



"TELL ME THAT AGAIN; ABOUT NEVER LEAVING THERE."

RHODA THORNTON'S GIRLHOOD.

BY

Smith (Smith)
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"

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PREFACE.

THE publishers believe that no more fitting introduction to this beautiful story can be presented, than this unsolicited testimony of New England's great poet:—

AMESBURY, 10th, 6th mo., 1872.

My Dear Friend:

I have read some chapters of the serial story, "RHODA," in the "Museum," with great satisfaction. It strikes me as a very successful picture of New-England life, in its local coloring and characterization. I hope it may be presented to the public in a more permanent form, as I think it would prove a favorite with young readers.

I am very truly thy friend,

JOHN G. WHITTIER.

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RHODA THORNTON'S GIRLHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE ALMSHOUSE OF STONEFIELD.

POOOR, palsied, old Uncle Zeb sat on a bench under the elm-tree that grew behind the almshouse of Stonefield. It was a warm morning about the last of July, or Uncle Zeb would have chosen the sunny step to crouch on; for he seemed always cold, and with the great, striped gray cat, could generally be found enjoying the full glare of the sun.

Stonefield was a quiet farming town, which had but few paupers to support, and the almshouse was a pleasant farm-house, differing little from the neighboring homesteads — outwardly, at least. But the twenty or thirty inmates were not a family group to be desired, — the lame, halt, and blind, feeble old age, and helpless little children.

It was a sad kind of a place, after all. They had enough to eat and to wear; for Mr. Harmon and his wife were good-natured, rough people,

whose interest it was to keep their charges comfortable; but it was not much like a home where father and mother and children meet together.

This warm July morning all able to help were off in the hay-field, for yesterday the great meadow was mowed, and now, far down in the west, the clouds looked a little showery; so Mr. Harmon, knowing he must make hay while the sun shone, had hurried off his household. But Uncle Zeb's day of usefulness was long passed; he could only crawl out to the bench, and with his dim eyes watch the children playing on the grass, and, now and then, stroke gray Tip, the cat.

It was half-witted Susy Blake's particular business to look out for the children; but to-day Mrs. Harmon, red-faced and over-driven, had called her to wash and pare the vegetables for dinner. Presently hearing one of the children crying, Susy came to the door to shout, —

"Uncle Zeb! Uncle Zeb! can't you take care of them young ones? Don't you see Lizy Carr is pulling everything away from the others?"

"Lizy, I'll come out there and give it to you if you don't stop!"

But Lizy, a venomous little thing, nine or ten years old, paid no heed to Uncle Zeb's mumbled entreaties to do better, or to Susy's threats, but thinking the field her own, overturned the mud-pies, threw away the ragged hats, twitched the uncombed locks, and performed a kind of witch

dance. At length she spied little three-year-old Jimmy Thornton, — the youngest child in the house, and one of the latest comers, — sitting close to the foot of the elm, with a great bunch of ox-eyed daisies and red clover in his hand. She made one dart, and Jimmy was rolled over, the flowers were thrown up in a kind of fountain spray, and trampled on as they came down; but the avenger was behind her. Before daisies and clover were half trampled, Lizy felt her old shaker bonnet violently pulled off, saw it in higher regions than Jimmy's flowers had visited, and received such a ringing slap on the cheek as to bring tears to her eyes.

Her first thought of returning the new comer's blow with interest was reconsidered when she looked at Rhoda Thornton's face, a little brown, freckled face, surrounded with flowing, waving hair, of a shade so near red as to afford a convenient handle for disparaging remarks; but now the blue eyes fairly blazed with indignation and rage, and Lizy thought best to cry, and say, —

"What did you do that for? I had n't touched you, Rhoda Thornton."

"No, and you won't touch me, you naughty, wicked girl! You ought to be ashamed; you only plague the little ones. If you touch my brother Jimmy again —"

A nod of the head that went with this last remark finished it sufficiently.

So, picking up Jimmy, she, a mite of a girl, only ten years old, sat down side of Uncle Zeb, and soothed Jimmy, as though she had seen forty years. The little fracas had seemed to wake up Uncle Zeb's dormant faculties, and he watched her with considerable interest. Presently he saw that while she amused Jimmy, tears were running down her cheeks.

"What makes you cry? Ain't afraid of her—are ye?"

"O, no!" said Rhoda, astonished to hear the old man speak.

"Then what are you crying about?"

"I am so sorry I did it," said she, blushing, and looking down at Jimmy.

"Did what?" asked he.

"Why, struck Lizy, and let myself get so mad. I promised my mother I would n't let my temper get up so, and here I've been and acted just as bad as ever"; and now the sobs broke out.

"Where is your mother?"

"Why, did n't you know she is dead?" said Rhoda. "They brought Jimmy and me here the day after she was buried, and now he has n't got anybody but me; and that's what made me so mad with Lizy; but I do wish I had n't acted so."

"Where's your father?" said Uncle Zeb.

"I don't know, but mother thought he was dead. He went off to California when Jimmy was a little baby, and mother never heard from him. I wish he was alive, and could take us away from here.

Mother cried and cried to think we must come here, but she said if I took good care of Jimmy, and did the best I could every day, the Lord would never leave me nor forsake me; but I haven't done the best I could to-day."

Rhoda was talking on, more for her own satisfaction than for Uncle Zeb's, who sat looking at her in a dazed kind of way; but his eye brightened when she quoted her mother's saying.

"Tell me that again," said he, "about never leaving thee."

She repeated the passage reverently.

"My mother could say 'most all the Bible, it seems to me," said Rhoda.

"I used to know such words too," mused Uncle Zeb, "but now they kinder come and go, and I like to hear somebody else say them."

Jimmy was going to sleep now in Rhoda's arms; so she sat still. The other children had gone round the house, and there were only the summer forenoon sounds to break the stillness. An old clucking hen was leading a great family round, who talked continually. The foolish old bird thought they were all her own, not knowing that two or three broods had been imposed upon her, under cover of darkness. Over in the rye-field a gaunt, long-necked turkey was promenading her soft-voiced darlings, who whined, "O, dear!" every step they took.

Rhoda remembered all these things that she

heard and saw that day from what happened after ; she remembered how a quail, which sounded close at hand, kept calling "more wet" to a distant comrade, which answered with the same information, both threatening Mr. Harmon's hay. And the locusts and grasshoppers kept up such shrill singing, that she said "it almost went through her head."

But as the sun became higher, the shade under the elm became denser and more grateful ; so Zeb and Rhoda, with sleeping Jimmy, quietly waited. At length the old man roused up again.

"What was your father's name?"

"Silas Thornton, and my mother's name was Sylvia Warren before she married," answered Rhoda, glad to talk again.

"Warren ; I used to know Warrens," said Zeb, who, like most old people, could recall and talk of the past, while the present was a blank ; he could not have remembered what he saw or heard the day before, but he would at times tell long stories of people that lived and things that happened so long ago, that they seemed like dreams to the listeners.

Poor Uncle Zeb had been young, and had relatives and friends and pleasures in his day, but now almost ninety years of use had worn his earthly body nearly out, and one after another of those whose duty it would have been to care for him had gone from earth ; so here in Stonefield

almshouse he waited to put off the mortal and take on the immortal. He had never had much worldly wisdom, but the Lord's "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" had been his, and now his Lord's promises still "came and went," as he said, through his mind, and he waited.

"Yes, I used to know Warrens. Old Squire Sylvester Warren was the richest man over in Northfield, where my uncle lived, when I was a boy. I worked there on his farm one summer. All the great folks from the city used to come out there and have gay times, feasting and dancing; but he was a hard old man, and his sons were wild. He had a daughter who died young. She was the best-looking young woman in those parts; her name was Silvy."

"Why, that was my mother's name I told you," said Rhoda.

"Yes," said Zeb, paying no attention to her, "her name was Silvy; and his son Joseph married against his will, and he turned him off, and William didn't turn out much, and I suppose they're all dead now. 'Most everybody is dead now, except old Zebedee Pettis; he seems to live a long time," continued he, talking to himself. "But the Lord told him a long time ago that 'he would never leave him nor forsake him,' and that if he walked through 'the valley of the shadow of death,' he need 'fear no evil,' for he would be with him."

Uncle Zeb stopped, and leaned his head back against the tree, with a little sigh, and Rhoda went on listening to the birds for a few minutes longer; but the sun was right overhead now, and presently a great blast from the tin horn, to call in the hay-makers, told that dinner was ready, and woke up Jimmy at the same moment.

"Come, Uncle Zeb, to dinner," said Rhoda, joyfully; for breakfast had been early, and the little town's poor children had no mother's pantry to go to for lunch (and that was not a bad thing for them); so she and Jimmy ran in without waiting to see if Uncle Zeb followed.

Jimmy was perched up on a high stool beside Rhoda, and as he did not like boiled salt pork and vegetables, he had his rations of brown bread and molasses. Rhoda had her hands full in trying to supply her own mouth and keep him from dripping his sweets over himself and the table, which, she knew, would bring down reproof, and he would cry, and be sent from the table. Then, Lizy had not forgotten her little rebuff of the morning, and kept kicking Rhoda and Jimmy under the table; so, no wonder she did not notice that Uncle Zeb had not come in. When dinner was nearly over, she heard Mr. Harmon asking for him.

"Why, there he sits, asleep under the elm-tree," said some one who could see out of the window.

"He grows so stupid he won't know enough to come to his meals much longer," said Mrs. Har-

mon, rather crossly, for it was hot, and her helpers not very efficient.

"Well, let him alone," said her husband, "till I get through dinner, and I'll send him in."

But Uncle Zeb's rest could not be broken; the dim eyes saw no more on earth, the palsied hands trembled no longer. His Lord's promises had been sure; he had "walked through the valley of the shadow of death, fearing no evil" — walked through to the Lord's mountains beyond.

Rhoda and the other children stood awe-struck, but curious, as they brought the old man's body into the house. They waited round, and listened, till they knew that all preparations were finished, and that Uncle Zeb's body lay stretched under a white sheet, in his darkened little room; then they wandered out into the barn, to talk it over; for the shower that the western clouds and the quails had predicted, was close at hand. So to the barn with Susy Blake they all went.

Susy was thirty years old, but in many things she was as young as the youngest there. Lizy Carr was sufficiently impressed to have given up her feud with Rhoda, and as one of the older children, began to give her views and opinions.

"I shan't sleep a wink to-night; shall you, Rhoda Thornton?"

"Why not?" asked Rhoda.

"Why, I shall be afraid of seeing Uncle Zeb's ghost."

"I don't believe in ghosts," said Rhoda; "but if I did, I think I should try to sleep, so as not to see it."

"O, it would come in and wake me up; it would come in with its arms up so, and with a great groan, so!" said Lizy, with a long-drawn kind of bellow, and opening her eyes in a most fearful way.

The little children were her admiring and horrified audience, and she was going to impress them.

"There are ghosts — ain't there, Susy?" continued she, seeing Rhoda still unconvinced.

"Yes," drawled Susy, with her cross eyes very wide open, and shaking her head. "My aunt knew a woman that saw a ghost, and it was a great big thing, and it had horns, and it made a noise 'most like a cow, and the woman run home, and she died ten years afterwards!"

"Poh!" said Rhoda; it was a cow, I suppose."

"No, it warn't, Rhoda Thornton, so now!" said Susy; "'twas a great, awful ghost."

Lizy did not seem to think Susy's story added much to the probability of there being ghosts; so she changed her attack.

"Well, if you don't believe in ghosts, you'll see one. I bet Uncle Zeb'll 'pear to you."

"Well," said Rhoda, thinking it over, "I don't think I should be scared if he did. He'd only be Uncle Zeb. He has seemed kind of old and

strange, and I don't believe but that his spirit would seem younger and more like other folks; but then I know he won't come back, Lizy. What should he for? He must be so glad to get out of that sick, old, shaky body, and away from here! He said this morning that 'most everybody seemed to be dead; now, you know, he'll find all those old folks that he used to talk of alive."

Susy seemed not to understand what Rhoda said, but to be soothed by it.

"Who told you such things?" asked she.

"My mother," answered Rhoda, sadly. "I wish Jimmy and I could be with her."

"O," cried Lizy, "it's dreadful wicked to wish you was dead."

"Well, I don't exactly wish that," said Rhoda; "but it's pretty hard to live here with Jimmy, when I think how nice it used to be when I went to school, and mother was well, and Jimmy all dressed up and at home with her."

"Jimmy havin' dood time now," said he; and his little round face came peeping out of the hay.

"You must n't get in the hay," said Susy, "or Mr. Harmon'll whip you; he says the cows won't eat it, if it's pulled over."

So Jimmy's good time was spoiled.

Now the rain was beginning to fall, and Mr. Harmon and his men were coming up with the loads of hay. He sent the children scampering into the house; and they ate supper with the light-

ning flashing through the sky, and the thunder rattling the dishes with its heavy roll.

And then Rhoda helped the little ones undress, and at length crawled in beside Jimmy, and fell asleep, listening to the rain on the roof close over their heads.

There were three beds in the large attic under the roof where Rhoda and Jimmy slept. Susy Blake and Lizy Carr occupied one, Jane Hunt who was lame, and her sister Viny, had the third. Jane and Viny were feeble little girls, who seemed likely to live there until their death, as they would never be strong enough to bind out to service, or take care of themselves.

Rhoda could never tell how long she had slept that night, when she was wakened by Susy and Lizy, both calling her in distressed voices. She struggled out of her sleep, and sat up in bed. The rain was over, and in the bare, uncurtained window the full glory of the moon was pouring. She could hear Jane and Viny sobbing with affright under the bedclothes, drawn over their heads, while Susy was sitting bolt upright, crying, "Ow, ow, ow!" almost like a dog yelping, and Lizy was throwing herself up and down on the bed in unmixed terror.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked poor Rhoda, infected with fear in spite of herself.

"O, the ghost, the ghost!" gasped Lizy; "don't you see it over there in the corner?"

Rhoda turned her head, and there in the dark corner, nearer to her than to any of the others, was something tall and white, slowly advancing and retreating as it waved its arms. It was only by a mighty effort that the little girl prevented herself from screaming and joining in the wild terror of her companions ; but she remembered what she had said in the afternoon, and also what her mother had often told her of the continual nearness and care of the Lord for his children ; so she shut her mouth and eyes to calm her little frightened soul ; but opening her eyes after a second of wordless prayer, the grim spectre had shrunk, and resolved itself into Susy Blake's long, faded, light calico dress, which she had hung on a nail.

The door being a little open, the fresh wind that had sprung up after the thunder-shower was waving and blowing it in this uncanny manner. It was not in human nature to resist exultation after experiencing relief from such a weight of fear.

"Why, you foolish things !" exclaimed Rhoda ; "don't you see it's only Susy's dress ?"

It was some time before she could convince the frightened children ; but she boldly took down the offending garment, and at length peace reigned again. Lizzy, it seemed, had been awakened, probably by the gust that forced open the door, and she at once perceived the ghostly form approaching and waving its arms, as she said it would ; and she soon had the whole room roused.

Lizy made Susy Blake promise not to tell of the affair ; but poor Susy's promises might have been written in water. Before breakfast the next morning Lizy's ghost was told of, and inquired after by all the household ; and Lizy's opinions lost ground, while Rhoda's gained from that time among the children. Susy seemed not quite sure about it, but said if it had had horns, and had made a noise like a cow, she should have known it was a ghost after all.

It was Friday that Uncle Zeb died, and Mr. Harmon immediately sent notice of his death to newspapers in the neighboring city ; for though years had passed since any relative or near friend of his had been heard from, still it might be seen by some one who had once known the old man ; and so it proved, for a little before the hour appointed for the funeral, the next Sunday afternoon, a stout, covered wagon, drawn by a substantial horse, drove up to the almshouse door, and an angular, spare old woman dismounted. She told Mrs. Harmon that her name was Deborah Nichols, and that when she was a young woman, Zebedee Pettis, then middle-aged, had worked for her father. She had never heard what became of him, but when she saw the notice of his death, she determined to attend his funeral, and pay what respect she could to one whom she remembered as an honest, good-hearted man.

Rhoda and the other children, cleanly dressed,

and seated in a decorous row before the older paupers, listened while the old minister from Stonefield Centre said a few words to the companions of Uncle Zeb, who mostly listened to preaching and praying in a listless sort of way. Time and circumstances bore hard on most of the poor creatures, and they were just "waiting."

Then four of the men carried the plain coffin out, over the next field, into a little sandy patch of ground set apart from the almshouse land for burial purposes.

Rhoda, with the others, looked on to see the grave filled up, and then came home. She found that Jimmy, who was too small to be promoted to the honor of attending a funeral, had run out into the barn-yard, where he became so fearfully dirty, that, I am sorry to say, he received a thorough shaking, was undressed, and sent to bed in disgrace, which so grieved Rhoda, that she came very near having another relapse of temper, and she went to bed in a hopeless and sorrowful state.

And thus the tiresome days dragged on for another week. She had been a good scholar when at school, but now she could find no books. Lizzy was mischievous, and sometimes malicious; Jane and Viny, poor little ignorant girls, who only knew their letters, and sickly and dull, said but little.

Once in a while she got out her Bible, which was the only book she was allowed to have; but

Lizy laughed, and made fun of her, and she knew she was only reading it for amusement, and felt it hardly right to do that; then Jimmy was daily getting into trouble, and she was alwas angry if he was punished or blamed; worse than that, he was learning bad words and ways. At times the thought of how her mother would feel to see them so living would almost break her heart.

But she was only a little girl, and the older people round her seeing her playing or working as she was bid, had little understanding of the trials and griefs that were shading her naturally cheerful spirit.

When the Saturday of the week following Uncle Zeb's death came, Rhoda, Lizy, and the little Hunts were instructed how to string the beans for dinner, and were seated round the great basket. It was like a fairy task, for the basket seemed just as full to them as it did when they began, more than half an hour before. Lizy was shirking her share, and hindering the others; Jane and Viny were slow; Jimmy had wandered off, and, Rhoda was afraid, had gone to the trough where the horses and cows drank. He did it almost every day, and was brought in screaming, wet, and dirty, to be punished.

"O, it was so discouraging!" thought Rhoda.

Lizy, whose eyes were everywhere except on the beans, here informed the children that —

"There's that woman that came to the funeral, driving in at the big gate."

The carriage came up to the front door. Mrs. Deborah got out, and then the boy who was driving started the stout jog-trotting horse round to the shade, at the end of the house, where the children were seated. They were a little afraid of being run over when the old fellow came thumping round so fast; but when they looked up in the driver's face, and saw what a jolly, kind, sun-burned face looked laughingly down at them, they could only smile back.

"I guess you like string-beans round here," said he, "if you're going to eat all them. Don't think I'll stay." The children were too shy to answer him. "Why don't you say, 'You'd better wait till you're asked'?" continued he.

"It would n't be polite," said Rhoda, pleasantly.

"Oh, 't would n't," said he, showing his white teeth as he laughed. "What's your first name, Miss Polite?"

"My first name's Rhoda, and my last name's Thornton."

"Then Polite is your middle name."

"No, it is n't my name at all," said she; "but there comes Jimmy. I am so glad!" as the little fellow came round the house, escorted by the cat, who, since Uncle Zeb's departure had transferred her attentions from the oldest to the youngest member of the household.

Just then Susy Blake's voice was heard.

"Rhoda Thornton, Mis' Harmon says, wash your hands, and come right in the parlor."

CHAPTER II.

MISS DEBORAH AND THE FARM-HOUSE.

"WHAT do you suppose she wants of me?" said Rhoda, whose heart seemed up very near her throat.

Lizy had been there much longer, and might know.

"Maybe that woman has come for a girl to live with her and work, and they are going to send you."

"But where's Jimmy? I must take him in," said Rhoda.

"No, they don't want *him*," said Lizy.

"But I shall take him. He must go wherever I do."

Rhoda, after washing her own and Jimmy's face, and smoothing his hair, walked tremblingly into the parlor. The old woman was seated very uprightly on the black haircloth sofa. Her face was a good index of her character. Plain, straightforward, and thoroughly just; she was rigid and unbending with herself as well as others. She owned the fine old farm on which she lived, and

she managed and carried it on in a manner hardly to be surpassed. She had no near relatives living ; but at different times had taken several boys and girls, whom she had brought up and sent out into the world useful men and women. Now she had only Jotham Harris, the good-natured boy of nineteen years, who had talked to the bean-stringers. She had concluded, she told Mrs. Harmon, that she was too old to again take a small girl ; but seeing the little row at Zebedee Pettis's funeral, she thought maybe she might be spared long enough to see another of sufficient age to care for herself. Lizy had been put in one place, and soon came back, like a bad penny ; so Mrs. Harmon did not recommend her. The little Hunts were not to be thought of, but Rhoda Thornton would, it seemed to her, just suit Miss Nichols. Jimmy she said nothing about, for Miss Nichols would not want him, and he could stay at the almshouse for a few years, until he was able to be put in some place ; besides, Rhoda would be more useful without him.

So Mrs. Harmon looked decidedly displeased at seeing Jimmy, as he came trotting in, holding fast to Rhoda's hand ; but before she had time to send him out, Miss Deborah's quick eye spied him through her glasses.

"This is Rhoda — is it? A good name ; but who is this little tot with her?"

"My brother Jimmy," said Rhoda, feeling that

now was the time when her soul was to be tried, but that she must prevail.

"Miss Nichols is here to see about having you to live with her; you will have a very good home, and learn to be a smart girl. Jimmy we will keep here a while longer; maybe some one will adopt him," said Mrs. Harmon, decidedly.

Rhoda's face grew white and set; she was a timid child, and dared not speak out often; but now she must.

"O, Mrs. Harmon, Jimmy must go where I go! I promised my mother I would watch him always."

"Well, but, Rhoda, you must talk and understand sense. You are nearly ten years old, and must go when you have a chance. Now, Jimmy is too little to do anything, and he must stay here till he can be done something with."

The great tears began to roll down Rhoda's cheeks, but she controlled her sobs; she must have voice to speak.

"Won't you please take us both? You don't know what a stout girl I am, and how I will work if you only will."

Poor little thing. she did not look very stout and able.

Miss Deborah turned to Mrs. Harmon.

"What should I do with such a child? He is n't three years old — is he?"

"O, yes," cried Rhoda; "he was three last

spring, and he'll grow real fast. He can help pretty soon."

"I am beginning to grow so old that I don't think I can undertake it," said she, in a low voice, to Mrs. Harmon.

"Well, we'll manage it. Rhoda must n't lose such a chance."

But the little girl heard all they said; fear of separation made her alive to every word, and at this her self-command gave way. She caught up Jimmy, who, frightened at her tears, began to cry also.

"O, dear me, what shall I do? what shall I do? I promised my mother, and now they make me leave you, Jimmy. O, please, please don't do it!"

Rhoda rocked to and fro in the chair she sat down in.

"It does seem a pity to part them. I don't know but I must give up taking her," said Miss Deborah.

"It would be a pity for her to miss such a chance," replied Mrs. Harmon.

"O, I will try so hard if you will only take us both!"

"I wish you would call in my boy, Jotham Harris; he would have a good deal of the trouble if I should let both children come," said the old lady.

Jotham was soon called, and came in, looking

rather shame-faced and uncomfortable, but pleasant and cheerful nevertheless.

"Jotham, you know I came to see about a little girl, and I found the very one I picked out the other day would be the right one; but she has that little brother, and she can't bear to even think of leaving him. Now, I can't seem to see what to do about it."

Jotham, who was a distant relation of Miss Nichols, and called her aunt, looked over at sobbing Rhoda and Jimmy. His kind face clouded.

"Why don't you take 'em both? That little shaver is a real cunning one. I was looking at him this morning, and laughing to see him step round with the cat out there."

"But you know how much trouble and care he would be."

"Well, I don't believe but he'll be more fun than trouble, aunt Debby."

"Well, Mrs. Harmon, I can but try them a while, and see. I want to do what's right, and I'll take both. I'll send Jotham over after them next Monday afternoon. I would take them to-day, but I'm going on farther."

Rhoda could hardly believe the evidence of her ears; but with release from the intense anxiety, her shyness returned, and she could only say, pressing up to Miss Deborah,—

"I think you're very good to me — very good indeed."

"Well," said she, "you must try and be a good girl."

Jotham made a funny bow at Jimmy as he went out, that made the little fellow laugh and hide his face on Rhoda's shoulder.

When the children went out doors again, everything seemed changed. To think that only two more nights and days, and they were going ten miles off to live! It gave them importance in the eyes of the other children.

But Lizy, who had tried a place, told frightful stories of the hardships and ill treatment to be encountered.

"You'll wish you was back here 'fore a week's out. Here you get knocked round, and don't have much fun; but there they watch you, and make you work all the time. You can't get off no how."

"Well," sighed Rhoda, "I am going to have Jimmy any way."

"He'll only make more for you to do. I should think you'd leave him here. I can't bear plaguy little young ones."

Now, Lizy was not so naughty a girl as her words and actions might lead us to suppose. She was a bright, active child, that must find some outlet for her over-flowing life; and the poor little thing had met with neglect or ill treatment all her days; hence she knew nothing better than to throw out all her quills, like a porcupine. Had she been

the loved child of some good home, she would have been the pride of her parents, on account of her bright, active ways. Her black eyes, her even, white teeth, and abundant hair made her attractive even now ; but, alas for poor Lizy ! no one was ready or willing to train the little witch-girl into the noble woman she might become. She could remember neither father nor mother, and she was a kind of female Ishmaelite, whose hand was against every one, and every one's hand against her ; but she was not so naughty as she seemed. We are glad to think that our heavenly Father, who alone can judge aright, finds seeds of good in such neglected, weed-grown hearts, and can keep them alive to save souls that, to our dim eyes, might seem lost.

But it was fated that a good deal more should happen to our little heroine and hero before Jotham came for them on Monday. After dinner, Saturday, Rhoda, Lizy, and Susy Blake were told they might take pails, go down the hill about a quarter of a mile, and pick blackberries.

This was a pleasant task, and they started, unmindful of the heat. Jimmy was rather small, but there was no one to take care of him ; so his short legs trudged along with them.

When they reached the field which they were directed to visit, they found pickers had been before them ; only green and red berries could be found. A man who was letting down the bars



“THIS IS RHODA — IS IT? A GOOD NAME; BUT WHO IS THIS LITTLE TOT WITH HER?” Page 27.

into the next field, to drive his ox-team through, told them that a few fields farther on berries were plenty. So, not wishing to carry empty pails home, they went on. The berries were fine and abundant, as the man had said; and in spite of the scratching, clinging vines, they soon picked their pails full, besides eating all they wanted. Jimmy was black from ear to ear, for he only filled his own little mouth.

They had walked through one field on the way home, when they found the next one occupied by cattle, which had come into it while they were picking berries. One cow had rather a wild look and way, and to their terror advanced towards the children whenever they attempted to get over the stone wall. Even Rhoda was afraid of cows, harmless, quiet creatures as they are. I am afraid of them myself when they look at me and shake their heads. So the children were in a quandary.

"Let's sit down here on this side and rest," said Rhoda. "Maybe she'll go away, thinking we have gone."

Susy Blake was perched upon the wall with a great stick, which she flourished, and shouted. —

"Sho! go 'long! Sho! go 'long!"

But Mooly looked at her disdainfully for a while, and then shook her head, and made a little run towards her, which caused Susy to retreat so suddenly as to fall flat on her back, followed by two or three stones from the wall.

Nothing better offering than what Rhoda had proposed, they sat down in the shade.

"I don't s'pose she'd hurt us," said Lizy, "but I'm scared of her."

"Jimmy 'fraid moo too," said he, rhyming unconsciously.

"She's ugly, I know," said Susy, who felt rather shaky yet, after her fall. Every now and then one of them would peep over the wall; but their enemy, who was feeding unconcernedly, always lifted her head and looked at them with a little toss, as if to say, —

"You'll see what you'll get if you come here!"

So they sat and talked till the sun began to throw very long shadows; then they decided that they must risk the cow; but Jimmy was missing. They looked all around, and Rhoda was almost beside herself. Where could he be? After what seemed a very long search, a little foot was seen sticking out from behind some bushes, and there lay the tired little fellow asleep; so Susy took him up until he should be awake enough to walk, and they started again. Now the cow had gone; they could see her marching in line with the others, which were in the field, towards a pair of bars which a man was letting down for them to pass through.

"O, dear! it's milking time now," said Rhoda. "How late we shall be!"

The way certainly seemed three times as far as

it did coming, and tired Jimmy was so slow ! It grew dark fast, the weary fields stretched out before them ; but worse than all, when they at length reached the road, it was not the one they came. They were certainly lost !

Susy could only stand with open mouth and eyes, and say, —

" Why, I don't know nothin' where to go ! I never see this place before." Then she began to scold about Jimmy : " If we had n't had him, we should n't have been so late."

" Well," said Rhoda, " there's nothing for us to do but to walk on to some house, and find out where we are."

She spoke cheerfully, and started on with her poor little offending brother ; but her heart was heavy. What if they should not find any house, and have to stay out all night ? She had heard of such things. They might starve in the woods ; there might be wolves, though she did not believe there were : all these thoughts were chasing through her mind, and stray tears would force themselves down her cheeks. Just at the wolves' point, however, relief came. A long way from the road she spied a large farm-house. It was growing so dark that she might have passed without seeing it, save that at the gate, which opened from the road, two men were talking, and she heard their voices before she came to them. She stopped, and her companions with her, until she was noticed.

The men were talking so busily, that for a second or two they did not see her, and she had time to observe them. The one who leaned on the gate inside was a pleasant, stout farmer, past middle age, but not old; the one outside was much younger, apparently about eighteen or twenty; he had evidently come on horseback, as a fine black horse was pawing up the roadside with his impatient fore-foot, wishing folks would do their talking after he was in his stable.

"So Walter Warren wanted to be buried up at Northfield?" the older man was saying as they came up.

"Yes, it seemed so much his wish, that my aunt could not think of anything else," said the other.

In the pause that followed they saw Rhoda and her troop.

"Please, sir, could you tell us the way to Mr. Harmon's, the poor-farm?"

"Why, child, how came you here? It's two miles over there, on the other road."

"We lost our way out in the fields, where we went after blackberries," said Rhoda, with quivering voice.

How could she get Jimmy two miles more?

Good farmer Easton looked at the little party. One glance at poor Susy Blake told of her capacity.

"Well, the best thing for you to do is to go up to the house; and I'll come in a minute and see about it."

Rhoda hesitated.

"It is so late now, I know they'll be worried about us; and I suppose we ought to go right on."

"O, go right up! You can't walk so far with that little fellow this time in the evening. I'll see about it; come, young man, you walk up, and stay until I send this company on."

The young man seemed to think he would like to see the end of the affair; so he drew the bridle over his arm, and they made quite a cavalcade up the road to the house.

Such a bright, pleasant room as they came into! The evening was quite cool for a summer night, and the bright light looked cheering to the children. Everything was put in order for Sunday, and a large, motherly-looking dame, and her pretty, young daughter, stout, and evidently the image of her mother when young, sat unemployed, taking their Saturday evening rest.

"Well, wife, here's company for you. Look at these poor things come out from the almshouse blackberrying, and got strayed over here, nobody knows how; and this gentleman is young Mr. Waring, come over to see about arranging for the funeral of Walter Warren. He's to be buried in their old burying-ground, over in Northfield."

Mrs. Easton was rather flurried at so many and different objects of interest presented to her notice; but Mr. Easton, a man of business, straightened matters at once.

"Martha," speaking to his daughter, "tell Moses to harness old Pete into the wagon to carry them home, and you get them something to eat, and I'll finish talking about this funeral."

"Was Walter Warren a relation of yours?" said Mrs. Easton to the young man who was so occupied gazing at the strange almshouse group that he did not know at first that he was addressed.

And the good woman, following the direction of his eyes, did not wonder. Susy Blake, with her vacant cross eyes, and open mouth, sat on the edge of a chair; Lizy, completely quelled and shy, had slunk into the darkest corner she could find; but Rhoda, who felt she must bear the burden, sat full in the light, with Jimmy in her lap. The freckles and sunburn were not to be seen by lamp-light; the evening damp still clung to his curly, auburn hair; the clear blue eyes, with their suggestion of tears, and the drooping corners of the mouth made a touchingly beautiful and sad child-picture.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am; did you speak to me?"

Mrs. Easton repeated her question.

"He was my aunt's husband, and a very good uncle to me. I was named for him; my name is Walter Warren Waring."

"Quite a lot of W's to write," said Mr. Easton.

"He had no children, I believe," said Mrs. Easton.

"He had one daughter, named Sylvia, after his aunt who died when he was a boy."

"I have heard about her. Well, who is there of the old Warren stock left?"

"None of the name, I think, but my uncle's sister, Miss Esther Warren. She is a single woman, about sixty years old, and very proud and rich. There is so much which is unpleasant connected with Northfield, that she never comes here. She keeps house in the city, and has a country house at the sea-shore. But I will not stay any longer, I think. I must ride over. I was directed to Mr. Easton, as selectman of the town, and one who would assist in making arrangements; and I am glad to find that he used to know my uncle."

"Yes, I used to know him well when we were boys."

"Well, good night. You will oblige us by making arrangements for next Monday afternoon."

The young man mounted the impatient black horse, pondering many things as he rode away, but every now and then thinking, —

"Who is it that pretty child made me think of? I would like to know."

By the time he was off, Martha called the wanderers into the kitchen, where were a large pitcher of milk, slices of bread and butter, and a great plate heaped up with wonderful doughnuts. How good all tasted! If they could only escape blame at home, it was not so bad, after all.

The good farmer seemed to think of all things. "The moon's up, is n't it?" said he. "I think I'll drive them over myself. I can tell them how 't was better 'n Moses. And I guess I'll come round by Mr. Jones's," continued he, "to see about that funeral. You can go too, Martha, if you want to."

So he and Martha took the front seat, and the others got in back, and in a very short time they arrived at the almshouse, where they found Mr. Harmon preparing to start a hunt for them. But Mr. Easton, who was well known in the town, so arranged matters that not a word of blame fell on them, and they tumbled to bed and were asleep in a marvellously short time.

Sunday was a lovely day at Stonefield poor-farm. Mr. and Mrs. Harmon went sometimes to church, but the children seldom had clothes suitable, even if there should be a meeting near enough for their walking, which was only once in five or six weeks, when the school-house, about half a mile off, was used for that purpose. The meeting-house was more than two miles distant. The farm children were sometimes sent to school in this same district; but Rhoda had never been, as it was nearly the close of the spring term, when she and Jimmy came to Stonefield. Their mother had died in a town some distance away, but inquiry proved their father to have belonged in Stonefield. So here the little waifs were sent.

"I hope," said Rhoda to Susy Blake, on this Sunday morning, "that where we are going is near a meeting-house, and we can go every Sunday to church. I don't want to do just the same that day as any other."

"Well," drawled Susy, "I like to see the folks come in, and hear the singin', but I get sleepy pretty quick — don't you?"

"I do sometimes, but not very often. I can't understand all the preachers say; but the reading and singing, and thinking that all the people there are reading and singing with me, make it pleasant, I think."

Lizy Carr seemed quite subdued this day; she was getting to respect Rhoda. She found her a kind, warm friend when well treated, but not disposed to tolerate any impositions; and she liked her all the better for that. The poor little Hunts were so sickly and dull, she knew she should miss Rhoda sadly.

"I 'most wish I was going to a place, too," said she.

"If you'd only act as well as you can, you'd be a great deal smarter girl than I," replied Rhoda. "I can't do things half so quick and well as you when you try."

Praise was so unusual to Lizy that tears almost came into her eyes, and she had to dance round, and act awkwardly, to avoid showing her feelings; but she said, after a while, —

"Well, if I get sent out again, I mean to try; only, if they go to treating me bad, I shall act bad, I expect."

Jimmy was rather cross and tired after the tramp the day before; and so, attending to him, and visiting the hens and the pigs, and other dumb friends, the long day wore away, and Rhoda and Jimmy whispered their prayers for the last time in this stopping-place of their life.

Brisk and early on Monday morning began the collecting together of the few things the little ones could call their own. Rhoda gave a beautiful, little, deserted, humming-bird's nest to Viny Hunt, who had a fancy for hoarding such things; her fine white jack-stones, that she was weeks hunting for before she found a set to her mind, she gave to lame Jane, whose active little hands tried to make up for her helpless little feet. It was some time before she could find anything to give Susy Blake; but she at last thought of a tiny looking-glass, in a gilt frame, one of her few relics of home which she could bestow. One would not have thought poor Susy would care for a looking-glass, but nothing gave her more satisfaction than to peruse her own face in a mirror; doing that her content was unbounded. She had nothing left for Lizy but her bird-feather "pin-sight," carefully arranged in a paper box, with a clear bit of glass over it. It was a very pretty thing, for the little girl had an artist's eye for beauty and color—sober, soft,

mottled feathers, from hens and turkeys, mixed with white from the geese, with now and then a brilliant spot of blue, where a feather from the jay shone, and the oriole's vivid orange. They made a unique "pin-show." Topsy furnished the wild bird plumage, for she was a mighty hunter among cats.

Mrs. Harmon was very kind to the children on this day, and saw that their small possessions were in the little trunk. Their clothing was good, but much worn, when they came to Stonefield; and children soon demolish half-worn things. Therefore Mrs. Harmon, to have them go decently, had purchased, some stout, cowhide shoes, and Jimmy was overwhelmed with a coarse, broad-brimmed, straw hat. But as they sat waiting, after dinner, to be sent for, they were two, sweet-looking little children, in spite of all disadvantages of dress. When the stout horse came thumping up to the door, Rhoda was not half so glad as she expected to be. She looked piteously at those around her; it had grown to be home, such as it was, and she was again adrift. Another new abiding-place to fit into! Poor little soul, no wonder the lips trembled, and tears fell! All kissed them, while Jotham, jolly and pleasant as before, threw in the trunk, and then tossed in Jimmy; Rhoda clambered in without a word.

"Let us hear how they get along," said Mrs. Harmon.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Jotham; and they were off.

Rhoda looked back until the road turned, then forward: the road and her life lay before her.

"Well, little boy, you've got more hat than head, have n't you?" said Jotham, chucking Jimmy under the chin, and making him laugh.

"How far are we going?" asked Rhoda.

"Well, it's about twelve miles to our house; but you see we ain't going straight there. I brought Aunt Debby round through Northfield, and left her at the old Warren place. There's a funeral there, of a rich city man that Aunt Debby used to know, and we are going back to take her after it's through."

"O," said Rhoda, "that's the same funeral I heard of where we went when we got lost Saturday."

"Did you get lost? Why, how did that happen?"

Rhoda who loved to talk when she could find an audience, gave him a long account of their adventures.

"Why, 't was up at Daniel Easton's, I'll warrant, you came cut."

"Yes, I remember now, they called him Mr. Easton."

Jotham looked pleased.

"I should n't wonder if you saw Martha."

"Yes, Martha got us some milk, and bread and butter, and doughnuts, and rode over with us."

Jotham smiled, but said nothing more.

The children were not old enough to appreciate the beauty of the country through which they were riding. For the three miles they had travelled, the road was a continual but gradual rise from Stonefield, with rich old farms stretching away on either side. And now they turned into a long avenue, at the farther end of which they could see a large, square-roofed house. Around the door stood groups of men; and under the shade of the many trees and outbuildings stood vehicles of all kinds, from the splendid city coach to the open wagons of the neighboring farmers.

"Aunt Debby said, if the funeral was n't over, we had better ride over here through the barnyard, and stand round at the end of that crib; there we could see, and not be seen much. I suppose she thought it would n't look right to be bringing a trunk to a funeral." So, obedient to instructions, they took their positions.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW HOME.

"WELL," said Rhoda, "I seem to see a great many funerals. Uncle Zeb's only a week ago, and now this one; and it seems strange that Uncle Zeb was talking about Warrens, who lived over in Northfield, that very morning he died. I'd just told him my mother was named Warren; maybe she was some relation to this man."

Jotham was so intent looking at the people who had begun to come out, that he paid no attention to what she was saying. The services were over; and the stately hearse, with two black horses, drove up to the door; the coffin was placed in it, and it drove down the avenue. Then a close-shut coach drove to the door, and the young man whom Rhoda had seen at Mr. Easton's, assisted a lady in black, with a long veil, into it; then the clergyman came out with another tall, black-robed lady; and thus one carriage after another passed down the avenue. Rhoda recognized the Eastons, and thought Martha saw her, but found it was Jotham she was smiling at

— not much of a smile, for, remembering she was at a funeral, she tried to look sober; but Jotham looked pleased, though a little red-faced.

"The graveyard is just over on the hill there," said he; and looking, they saw the hearse had already turned into it. Miss Deborah came out now, and hurried them off, so as to be away before the carriages came back.

"So here's Rhoda and Jimmy. Well, I'm afraid they'll be pretty tired before they get home," said she, after they started; "but we have such a long ride before us, that it won't do to stop, so we must eat some gingerbread we've got here, and go along."

She talked a little while to the children, and then began to look at the farms they were passing, and to talk of the people who owned them, and their management, until Jimmy got to sleep, with his head in Rhoda's lap; and then the voices began to sound very far off to the little girl, and somebody seemed to be placing something behind her head, and she knew nothing more until everything stopped with a sudden "Whoa!" and they were at home.

Excitement and fatigue had so overcome the children, that they could not notice much that night, but ate their suppers half asleep; and only feeling what a clean, nice room and bed they were in, they slept dreamlessly till morning. The first

thing Rhoda knew, Miss Deborah was beside her bed, speaking low, —

"Come, get up, now; but don't wake your brother yet, if you can help it. Breakfast is about ready. After this, you must help get it; but I thought I would let you sleep this morning, you were so tired. You can come down-stairs and wash."

While Rhoda was dressing she had time to look round her room. The ceiling slanted down one side, so she judged it was under the roof; and looking out of the window, she found she was in the L of the house. She could look down into the poultry yard, where turkeys gobbled, ducks quacked, and hens, geese, Guinea hens, and numberless doves added their noise; but over on the fence was a more magnificent sight than all—a monstrous peacock, with tail all spread. Rhoda could hardly restrain herself from waking Jimmy that moment to see him. An older person would have been more struck with the beautiful scenery. Miss Nichols's farm lay gently sloping towards the south, and Rhoda's window looked over a green, fertile valley, to the hills of Northfield.

The little room was clean and comfortable, but with no superfluity or ornament. The floor was bare, except a long strip of home-woven rag carpet, which was spread between the bed and the small pine bureau. Over the bureau hung a shining little looking-glass, that made Rhoda's round

face have a very queer, twisted look, while her complexion was of a green tinge; but she saw the whitewashed wall looked the same hue in the glass; so she made up her mind she had not changed color during the night. When dressed, she went out into the passage. She found the stairway close at hand. The door of an adjoining room stood open; and seeing a tumbled, narrow bed, she concluded Jotham slept there, which she found afterwards was the fact. Another door led into the two-storied part of the house, where Miss Deborah slept; so she felt quite safe, and surrounded by friends. The stairs turned suddenly near the foot, and Rhoda found herself directly in the kitchen, where the breakfast was almost ready. A round table was set in the farther corner of the large kitchen, and corn cakes, fried ham, luscious sweet corn, and mealy potatoes were pleasant to sight and smell, and much more so to taste, the little girl thought, who had for so long lived on the not very well cooked fare at the poor farm.

As they finished breakfast, Jimmy was heard crying for Rhoda, who hurried up and soon brought him down. He was installed in a high chair which Jotham had found under the eaves in the garret. Miss Deborah said she rather thought it was the one she sat in herself when a baby. Certainly it looked ancient enough for almost any number of years to have gone over it; but Jimmy found no fault, although he did rather slip forward.

While he was eating his breakfast, aunt Deborah instructed Rhoda how to pick up and wash the dishes. She was a very hard worker herself, and wished all of her household to be the same. There were no waste moments in her day, and every household duty must be performed in the best manner. After the breakfast dishes were placed, each in its own particular spot on the closet shelves, she sent the little girl up to make her own and Jotham's bed. Rhoda was very sure she could do that without showing; but when Aunt Debby came up on a visit of inspection, both had to come to pieces again, and be made up in the prescribed manner. Rhoda felt rather down-hearted about it, but could see that a marked improvement was made in their appearance by the change.

Coming down, she found Jimmy had gone to the barn with Jotham and John Speers, Aunt Debby's hired man. He did not live there, but had a nervous, sick wife in a small house a little way down the hill. Aunt Debby was now going to her milk-room, and told Rhoda she might run over the house, and look into all the rooms, until she came up again. She was glad to do this, although she felt timid as she opened door after door, into large, darkened rooms. Aunt Debby clung to old fashions; she made no "new-fangled things," as she called them. There were no carpets in the house, except the home-woven ones, and, as it seemed to Rhoda, hundreds of rugs — rugs braided, and rugs

made of canvas, with gay rags sewed on or pulled through; for when other work failed, Aunt Debby always had rags on hand, as Rhoda afterwards found. Use, durability, and economy were all Aunt Debby looked for in buying or planning anything.

There was a large sitting-room, where the old lady sat in warm weather, whenever she allowed herself to sit down, and a great parlor, so darkened that when Rhoda opened the door, she started back in alarm at the row of eyes that stared at her from the wall; but she saw in a moment that they were only portraits. Aunt Debby's father had hired a wandering artist to paint portraits of himself, wife, and six children, for a very small sum of money; and the fearful results glared at visitors from eight, black, wooden frames. They were the only pictures Miss Nichols ever admired or tolerated. All the originals, save Aunt Debby, the baby of the group, had long since passed from mortal vision; but she traced likenesses, and loved them all, bad as they were made to look.

From the parlor Rhoda went up-stairs to the spare rooms, with their white floors bare, save the inevitable braided and tufted rugs, and smelling of lavender. She admired the high bedsteads, with testers, snowy curtains, and puffed up feather-beds that looked likely to smother one. She peeped into the gilt framed mirrors that hung over the high bureaus. They seemed astonished to see such

a young, little face looking into them. There were great cases of drawers, of which the legs were nearly as high as Rhoda's head before any drawers began. Consequently Aunt Debby had to mount on a chair to reach the top. When she came back through the sitting-room, she saw a bookcase, and paused to look into it. How she hoped there were books there she might be allowed to read ! but she dared not stay now, and she reached the kitchen just as Aunt Debby came up the cellar stairs.

Dinner was the next event ; and she helped with the vegetables, and ran to the barn to meet Jimmy, who was bringing in eggs in Jotham's hat, at great risk to both. He was wild with delight at seeing the peacock, but rather awe-struck at the gobbler, who seemed to know his little dress had been red, although now faded to a nondescript color. After the dinner table had been cleared away, Rhoda would have been glad to look at the books ; but Aunt Debby always had something to do.

"Now we'll go up-stairs, and look over your clothes. Mrs. Harmon said you had nothing fit to go to meeting in, and we must see about that ; and I think we'll put Jimmy into pantaloons this fall ; he's pretty small, I know, but it is less trouble, and warmer ; and Jotham has some old clothes I can cut over. I guess I've got the patterns I used to make his by."

Jotham was twenty years old now ; so poor

Jimmy did not bid fair to look very modern in his new clothes.

"Did Jotham always live here?" asked Rhoda.

"Ever since he was six years old; he was my cousin's boy. She was left a widow, and came here with him when he was six. She had consumption, — the slow kind, — and lived till he was twelve, and now I call him my boy."

"I think he's a good boy, though he's a pretty big one," said Rhoda.

"Your gowns are pretty much all alike, I think; but they were good ones in their day."

"Yes, as long as mother could work, she made us good clothes."

"How long was she sick?"

"Only three weeks. She had a fever, the doctor said."

Aunt Debby had inquired of others, to learn of the children's parents; so she did not pursue the conversation in regard to them, but turned to the clothes again.

"Well, I've some brown-and-white gingham, like a dress I once had. I bought a whole piece at a bargain, and it was the best thing to wash and wear; it will make a good dress for Sundays for a few weeks, and then do for a school dress."

"O, am I to go to school? How glad I am!"

"Yes, you are to go to school when the weather is right. You must get up early, so as to do up

the chores ; and when Jimmy gets his clothes, he can go part of the time too."

"I've wanted to go so much ! I'll try and do everything."

"About something for your head now. I've lots of straw braid in the house, and to-morrow I'll send you down with some to John Speers's house. His wife sews straw when she thinks she's able ; and she'll make you a hat. I can find some dark ribbon, and that will do both now and in the winter. Let's see ; it's Tuesday afternoon now. I don't suppose we can get all done this week ; but we'll see."

The gingham was brought from Aunt Debby's stores, and cut out that day. There was not much attention paid to the fit of it. Aunt Debby's chief object seemed to be to have it loose and large enough to allow of growth ; and the material itself was far from beautiful, looking more suitable for Miss Deborah than for a girl ten years old.

After breakfast next morning the Dunstable braid was found, and Rhoda directed to John Speers's house. John himself was a simple, sturdy man, who looked so hearty and so well fed that Rhoda was quite astonished to find his wife a puny, whining woman, sitting wrapped in a shawl, warm weather as it was. The little house was clean as hands could make it, for there were no children to mar things, or put them out of order. The two great objects of Mrs. Speers's life seemed

to be, to keep things in order, and to take medicine.

"So you're the little girl up to Miss Nichols's—be you? And you want a hat? Well, I don't know as John'll think I'm able—he knows how poorly I was last night—but I'll take the straw and the measure of your head, and try. You can come down Friday, towards night, and maybe it'll be done."

The week was a very busy one. What with helping make her dress, and the numberless little household jobs, Rhoda had very little time to think; but now and then she wished she could see some little girl, and play a while. Jimmy was growing to be the darling of all. John Speers carried him down to his house, to his wife, who quite "brightened up at sight of him, and took to him right off, and he to her," John triumphantly told Miss Deborah. He was rather proud of his feeble wife, but aunt Debby had not much patience with her. She worked, sick or well, and made no complaint, and expected others to do the same.

Friday night the hat was finished, and Saturday saw the gingham also completed, with a round cape made to go with the dress. Sunday morning was fine, and Aunt Debby decided to go to meeting with Jotham and Rhoda. John Speers carried Jimmy to his house, to the great satisfaction of himself and the little boy.

When the new dress, cape, and hat were on, Aunt Debby said, —

“ There, that ’s the way I like to see a child look ; no ribbons or foolishness ; there ’s something that will wash and wear.”

But poor Rhoda, when she looked at the little old-fashioned, brown figure in the glass, almost winced. As I said before, she had a fine eye for beauty and color, and she glanced at her coarse shoes with a sigh. I forgot to say that Aunt Debby, who could turn her hand to all trades, had shingled both the children’s hair — not very scientifically, but thoroughly, so far as shortness went ; so even that ornament failed Rhoda. The hat was trimmed with a well-washed ribbon, the original color of which was a puzzle. Now it was a dingy brown. But once in the covered wagon, with the sides rolled up, and Charley, the horse, trotting briskly along, she forgot her dress, and enjoyed every moment. They rode four miles over pleasant hills, and through beautiful valleys, until they came to the church, at Northfield Centre. There were a few fine residences here. Here was also the town-house, with its liberty-pole in front, not far from the church. A little farther on, a school-house, dignified by the name of academy, with a tiny belfry and bell, also fronted the elm-bordered green. Behind the church was a long shed, divided into stalls for horses and carriages, many of which were already occupied, while other horses,



RHODA VISITS MRS. SPEERS. Page 54.

hitched to posts and fences, were whisking and stamping off flies. As Aunt Debby and Rhoda were getting out, a stylish carriage drove up, and a little girl, about Rhoda's age, with a lady who seemed to be her mother, went up the steps at the same time. How beautifully the little lady was dressed — such a clear, white muslin, such nicely-fitting, bronze boots, and kid gloves, and the flowing sash, and hat ribbons! Rhoda saw them in a glance; but when she came, in her momentary survey, to the smooth curls, and delicate features, she shrank from the unmistakable look of disdain on the pretty face, as she held her dress away from the coarse gingham. The quick temper that held Lizzy Carr in check raged away in the little heart for a few minutes.

"How I would like to strike her, and tear off her fine clothes, to look so at me because I am poorly dressed," thought she, glancing over from the side pew, where she was sitting, to the well-placed seat in the centre of the church where the little girl was daintily fanning herself with a gorgeous fan.

It was not until the voice of the gray-haired minister, saying, "Having met together for the worship of Almighty God," fell on her ear, that she drove out the evil spirit and welcomed back the good.

"O, that I should feel so the first time I have been in meeting for so long!" was her ashamed

thought; and in spite of temptation, she resolutely pushed away all remembrance of the indignity offered her, or her ugly dress and hat, and thought of other and better things. Her mother had been a sweet singer, and Rhoda had inherited her voice, and when the familiar hymn tunes began to sound from the organ, her heart grew glad, and her clear, childish voice joined in with the voices of the congregation.

She was so engrossed that she did not see Aunt Debby's look of blended astonishment and amusement, as she watched her through her glasses, or that many others of her neighbors in church looked with kindly glances at her. Of course she could not understand much of the sermon; but to hear the Bible read, once more to sing hymns, and know that she was joining in the worship of the Lord, was so pleasant to her, that she was soothed and happy — so much so, that when the services were over, and Aunt Debby was stopping to speak to different persons, and the little high and mighty miss again gave the gingham-clad girl to understand the difference between them, gingham asserted itself, and gave muslin and ribbons an honest, straightforward, but unabashed look, and drove the unpleasantness away at once.

The Eastons were there, or Mrs. Easton and Martha were. They talked with Aunt Debby, and recognized Rhoda, inquired after Jimmy, and told her she must come and see them some time and

become acquainted. Mr. Easton, they said, was almost sick ; so they drove Pete themselves. Just then Jotham came, bringing Pete up to the steps ; he seemed glad to see them, but had not much to say ; then he brought Charley, and they started.

It was all pleasant, and Rhoda thought of Lizy and the Hunts, and concluded in her wise head that it was better to be in a place, if you did have to work' hard, and have no little girls to play with. Everything had been cooked for Sunday the day before, and Aunt Debby's custom was to have dinner and supper together when they returned home ; so by four o'clock the meal was eaten, and everything cleared away.

Rhoda was then told that she might do just as she wished. Jotham took Jimmy out for a walk ; Aunt Debby sat down in the favorite rocking-chair by the sitting-room window, with her Bible, and Rhoda was soon perched on a kitchen chair before the bookcase ; and a rather hard case it was for a little girl to find amusement from. Such a collection ! books of sermons, laws of the State, and of the United States ; a dictionary, one or two spelling-books, and a grammar, bound volumes of some farming periodicals, etc. ; but just as she was thinking whether she would give it up, or take down John Rogers's primer and Webster's spelling-book, she spied another old, well-worn volume, and opening it, and finding pictures, she concluded to try that. So, replacing the others, she carried

her chair back, and seated herself on the kitchen doorstep.

The frontispiece was a very ancient picture of a man with a great bundle on his back, walking on towards a far-off gate. She thought he must be a pedler, but the title-page showed the book to be "The Pilgrim's Progress," by John Bunyan. She began to read the wonderful dream that charms both old and young. Jimmy came home, but she could only smile at him, with her eyes still on the page. Jotham fed the poultry close by her, but turkey and peacock spread their glories in vain, if they coveted her notice. She listened to the arguments of Christian's neighbors; she waded through the slough with him; she grieved over Pliable's desertion; shuddered at Beelzebub's archers, and entered the gate delightedly, with the burdened one fleeing from the wrath to come. It was a sorrowful moment when Aunt Debby told her it was too dark for her to read any more.

"It will spoil your eyes, child; but that is a good book, and you can read in it some other time. So now go to bed with Jimmy; for to-morrow is washing-day, and we must be up real early."

So ended the children's first Sunday at Miss Deborah's.

And the days went on in the same monotonous hard-working way. Comfortable and well treated the children grew fat and hardy through the late summer and early fall. But one evening in Sep-

tember Jotham came home from the grist-mill, with good news for Rhoda, — the district school was to begin in one week from the next Monday. It was then Wednesday. The blue eyes danced, and she could hardly sit still.

"And, Aunt Debby," continued Jotham, "Mr. Bruce said it was a young woman going to teach, and she won't want to board round; and here's about the nighest place to the school-house, where there's anybody she'd want to board with at all, and he wanted to know if you would n't take her."

"That's just like Sam Bruce. His house ain't more than twenty rods farther off on the other road; but neither he nor his wife would ever think of troubling themselves to take any one."

"Well, nobody'd want to go if they did; for Mrs. Bruce is so cross and stingy, they would n't get enough to eat. Now, here, you know, everybody that comes gets so fat they don't know what to do. Just look at Rhoda's cheeks"; and he pinched the round, red specimens of Aunt Debby's good feeding.

Jotham wanted the teacher to come, and he knew how to manage to have his way.

"You should n't talk so about Mary Bruce; but then I guess it would n't be a very good place to live. I don't suppose it would make much difference to us, and Rhoda and Jimmy could go along when she went in the morning. I'll see about it to-morrow."

Jotham knew it was the same as settled, and that he should be sent to tell Mr. Bruce that the teacher might come; but Mr. Bruce, who was school trustee, came over himself, and saved Jotham the trouble. He said the new teacher was a Miss Miles, who had very good recommendations, and he thought would do. She came from a distance, and would arrive there on the Saturday before her school was to begin. She had friends at Northfield Centre, but that was too far away for her to board. So all was understood and arranged, and Mr. Bruce rode away.

Rhoda was a great castle-builder, and she formed many pictures, and imagined many things in regard to the new teacher. Her coming was the pivot round which everything turned; she could not understand how Aunt Debby could go on as if nothing of importance was about to occur. She had one of the chambers opened and aired, but beyond that did nothing out of the usual course.

Rhoda questioned Jotham as to what he supposed the lady would be like; and he gravely informed her that he guessed she was about as old as Aunt Debby, and had a long neck and hooked nose, and wore green spectacles; that she would have him cut a large stick each day from the black birch tree, and make Rhoda carry it to school. He would have talked some time longer, but she would not hear.

"I don't believe you think any such thing, Jotham Harris."

Still, though unbelieving, she could not help associating his description with her ideas of the teacher, and was much relieved when a little, elegant, fair-faced young lady dismounted from the stage on the Saturday night, which happened to be rainy. Miss Mary Miles had little idea of the wonderful admiration this little girl, with short hair and long dress, who stood by to take her bonnet and wrappings, was forming for her; but she thanked her pleasantly, and Rhoda went to bed happy.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOL DAYS.

THE rain fell on the next day steadily and plentifully. Aunt Debby staid not at home for that, however; but Miss Miles, who was suffering from headache, concluded not to venture out. Rhoda was left to keep house and take care of Jimmy. Miss Miles went to her room after Aunt Debby and Jotham drove away, and the little boy and girl were left down-stairs alone. Rhoda hurried up her few remaining duties, so as again to journey on with Christian, whom she had taken short journeys with every Sunday since her first one there. Jimmy had enough amusement in watching a litter of kittens that Jotham had found and brought from the barn in a basket, to the great disgust of the old cat, who was spending her spare moments in lugging them around by the back of their necks, trying to find some opening by which she could convey them to their nest in the hay again. The first time she tried it, Jimmy "scattered" her furiously, for he thought she was trying to eat the little furry things; but after Rhoda had

explained the matter to him, he thought it great fun to see the troubled old puss fetch and carry ; so Rhoda read in peace.

After a while kitty found a door ajar, and seizing one of her darlings, with head up marched for the barn, stepping daintily through the puddles, Jimmy watching her with delight from the window ; then back for another and another, until the four squeaking little things were safe at home again. Then Jimmy lay down on the chintz-covered settee, to think about it, and in thinking, his eyes shut up ; and when Rhoda became conscious of the unusual stillness, she found the little fellow fast asleep. So she went on into the land Beulah, and was walking and talking by the river which Christian by this time had reached, when Miss Miles's pleasant voice spoke close to her.

"What are you reading so interestedly, Rhoda?"

Blushing with shyness and pleasure, Rhoda answered, —

"I am reading what a man dreamed about another man named Christian."

"O, 'Pilgrim's Progress'!" said she. "I do not wonder you are interested. I read it the first time when I was about as old as you are ; and I have read it many times since. What are you reading now?"

"O, I am nearly through ! He is waiting by the river. Aunt Debby says there is a meaning to it which I must try to find out."

"Well, yes, there is a meaning; but I think you are rather young to find it out yet. You might as well read it now like any interesting story. You are to be one of my little scholars, I hope."

"Yes, ma'am. I am very glad I am to go to school, for it's nearly a year since I went, and I am afraid I shall forget all I used to know."

Miss Miles won Rhoda's confidence, and by a few leading questions led her to tell her sad little story.

"Well, dear, I am glad you have fallen into such good hands. You must try to be a good girl, and learn well; you will get along nicely; you will find many hard things; we all do," said Miss Miles, with a sigh; "but if we take things rightly, doing the best we can, thinking more of others than ourselves, we shall find the way made plain before us day by day, and pleasant things will come to us as well as hard."

She paused, hardly knowing whether Rhoda would understand her; but the little girl broke in gladly —

"I know it is so, for one Sunday" —

She stopped, remembering that perhaps she had better not tell of her dislike of her dress, and the little girl; but Miss Miles's smile and, "What of one Sunday?" reassured her, and the whole story came.

"Yes, I see you understand what I mean, through the best teacher, Experience; that's a teacher I

have taken, and am still taking, daily lessons of."

So they talked on, and when Jimmy woke up, he crept into the new teacher's lap, and heard stories about "Mother Hubbard" and "The House that Jack built." Aunt Debby found the three fast friends when she returned.

At sunset the rain was over, and his majesty the sun came out in full glory. Rhoda's heart bounded with joy, not for the beauty of the sight, but because the prospect was of a fair day on the morrow.

The next morning she was down-stairs as soon as Jotham, but in her great haste and excitement was far from helping as much as usual. Jimmy was not to go yet a while, until Miss Miles had organized her little tribe, and put them in working order. Jotham carried them over to show them the way. The school-house was a little, blank, bare-looking building, in an open lot, with a very scanty show of grass. Some half dozen children, of various ages, were already at the door, early as it was; most of them had dinner pails or baskets in their hands, and all stared at the teacher and Rhoda.

The interior of the house was roughly finished at first, and had not been improved by its years of use. Boot heels and jackknives had spent their force upon floor and desk; and the results showed a powerful agency in them. It smelt very clean and soapy now, for it had been well scoured on the Saturday before.

When the children were all gathered, at nine o'clock, Miss Miles found there were about thirty boys and girls, their ages ranging from five to eighteen years. She was a good reader of faces; and, with few exceptions, she found a pleasant, teachable, little company. But one surly-looking boy, about sixteen years old, was not so satisfactory; she read trouble with him. Among the girls, she saw one with a dissatisfied, tale-bearing face, and one or two dull, heavy countenances; but upon the whole, she was pleased with her pupils.

About all that could be done the first day was to learn the names and form the scholars into classes. To Rhoda's satisfaction, she found herself among the scholars forming the first classes, in most things. Study and books had always been a delight to her, and her year's rest had, it seemed, only brightened and freshened her acquirements. The surly boy was named Sam Hobart; he answered growlingly to questions, but said nothing disrespectful. Rhoda made some acquaintance with the girls, and fairly revelled in being once more among children. This first day was delight unalloyed and perfect.

In the evening Miss Miles questioned Jotham about her pupils, for he knew all the people in town. This was the town of Southfield, and of course lay south of Northfield. Stonefield lay adjoining both, on the east. When Jotham heard

that Sam Hobart had made his appearance he was indignant.

"That's too bad. That fellow has broken up the school two or three times; last time 't was a master, and they had a regular fight, and Sam blacked the master's eyes, and the master would n't stay if Sam war n't turned out. The trustee was old Mr. Battey, and he said the master must master Sam. So he would n't stay; said 't would spoil the school. Last year Sam did n't come; but now I bet he thinks it's a lady, and he can cut up again."

"What would the present trustee do, if he should make trouble?" asked Miss Miles.

"I rather think he'd say, 'Turn him out!' but it's too bad for him to be let come."

"Jotham, do you know two Brown girls, about as big as I am?" asked Rhoda.

"Yes, they live over on the turnpike; they are good little girls, I guess."

"I liked them ever so much," said she; "but one of the girls I did not like so well. She sits farther back, and is a bigger girl; her first name is Maria."

"I know; it's Maria Jones; she's always telling tales of the other scholars; and sometimes she makes up things that never happened, I guess."

"You'd say it quicker if you called it lying," said Aunt Debby, dryly.

"Well, 't would n't sound so well," said Jotham.

"Call things by their right names, I say," answered she.

For several days things went on pleasantly; but on Thursday all the scholars had become well acquainted with each other and with the teacher, and it was getting to be an old story. The scholars found Miss Miles a lady with a low voice and pleasant manners, but full of quiet determination; and most of them recognized her as their mistress, and accepted it as a fixed fact that they must do as she wished in school. But Sam Hobart, as she expected, was not willing to bow to that decision. She had been watching every day for some manifestation, but had all the time managed skilfully to avoid any rock that the smooth-sailing school-ship might run upon. But they struck an unexpected snag on Thursday afternoon.

School was almost done, and the first spelling-class was reciting. The custom was for a misspeller to put the misspeller down in the class, while the right speller went above. Miss Miles had, on the first day placed them according to height, which put Sam Hobart at the head, and Rhoda at the foot. Spelling was like breathing to Rhoda. So she had worked her way up to Sam. When she should have outspelled him, like Alexander, she could find no more to conquer; but he held his place manfully, and the lesson was nearly through — only three words more.

"Separated," said Miss Miles.

"S-e-p-e-r-a-t-e-d," spelled Sam.

"Think a moment, Samuel," said his teacher.

"S-e-p-e-r-r-a-t-e-d."

"Wrong. The next."

"S-e-p-a-r-a-t-e-d," spelled Rhoda.

"Right. Go up." Rhoda turned to step above him, but he moved nearer the wall, and looked at her threateningly. Some sound had made the teacher turn her head from the class, and she did not see this performance.

"I told you to go to the head, Rhoda," said she. The little girl looked pitifully at Sam, and made another attempt to pass him, with the same result. "I wish you to step down, so that Rhoda can go above you," said Miss Miles.

"I ain't a-going to. I spelt the word just as she did, and she shan't go up," growled he.

"Do I understand you to say you will not move down?" Sam muttered and mumbled some unintelligible words. "Speak plainly, Sam; you are nearly a man grown, and I want to know whether I have a gentleman or a boy in my school."

"I ain't a-going to move down."

"Very well, then, I shall not teach you. You are no longer a scholar of mine."

"You can't turn me out 'nless the trustee lets you; and they 'll tell you you must master me, and I'd like to see the woman that could do that."

Miss Miles made no reply, but put the next word to Rhoda, then to the next, until the lesson

was over, and the class took their seats. Sam stood a moment; he hardly knew what move to make, but he soon shambled to his seat.

"Now, children," said Miss Miles, "we have one scholar less. I am sorry to lose Sam Hobart; for he was getting to be a man, and should have learned much more before he left school, but he chose it should be so."

"I ain't a-going to leave," growled Sam.

He was more puzzled how to act than ever before. Miss Miles appeared neither to hear or see him.

"There may be something round here that seems like a scholar; but you must not think it is one until you see Sam Hobart come back and take his place as a new scholar, at the foot of the spelling-class. There is no such boy attending here. School is dismissed."

The little company started out joyfully. Sam was raging. What could he do to show his defiance? The children seemed to ignore his presence as well as the teacher. He whistled and stamped round the room while Miss Miles and Rhoda were getting ready; but quick-witted Rhoda seemed as unconscious as the teacher. Finally he made a great show of putting his desk in order for the next day, expecting to hinder their departure; but they quietly put on hats and shawls, and stepping from the door, the key was turned and they walked away. Here was a dilemma for Sam; he knew

the boys were waiting round, and he should be laughed at. He could jump from the window well enough. Miss Miles knew that; but that was no great triumph.

His first impulse was to tear things to pieces in the school-room; but in that case, he knew the trustees would interfere, and he must go. He could do nothing better than clamber out of the window, and go home. He left the window wide open; but that made no difference, for Jotham came by soon after, and shut it. When Aunt Debby and Jotham heard of the affair, they were pleased that Sam was "come up with," as Aunt Debby said; but they were afraid she would find him troublesome the next day.

"O, I expect that! and if I cannot manage to drive him into good behavior or away from school by such means, I must apply to the trustee; but I would like to do it myself. My fear is that he will interfere with the children; but I shall see to-morrow."

A little late, but before any lessons were recited, Sam lounged in the next morning. His first lesson was arithmetic. He enjoyed that, and prided himself on his proficiency in the study; but the poor, foolish boy had attended school such short terms, owing to his behavior, that he could only reach about the same place at each attempt at school. Miss Miles had kindly started him on, without putting him back to begin again, making herself

the trouble of an extra class, composed of Sam, and Johnny Gorton, a bright boy from the city, who was boarding with his uncle for a few months. It was trying to Sam to come to a sticking-place in his examples, and see Johnny, after a few words of explanation, go triumphantly on; but by no means could he draw attention to himself. Miss Miles appeared neither to see nor hear any such person. School went on smoothly, and at last he began to make slight disturbances, of which no notice was taken. In the afternoon he continued the annoyances, and at recess began to trouble and torment the others, especially Rhoda, whom he looked upon as the cause of the state of affairs; but Miss Miles rang her bell, and told the children, as it was Friday afternoon, they might have a short recess, and be dismissed earlier. This was satisfactory to all but Sam, who waited round a while, and then went home to plan his next method of attack.

Rhoda told Jotham of Sam's persecutions; how he called her names, and threatened her. Jotham said but little, telling her not to mind; he guessed he could fix it. Dr. Winter, of Northfield Centre, came over Friday night, to carry Miss Miles to spend Saturday and Sunday with his family; and Rhoda, who went to church Sunday, had the pleasure of an affectionate greeting from her, gingham-clad as she was, and all before the fine, little miss, whose name she found was Fanny Folger. This

little lady had shed her muslins, and shone in a dainty, fall toilet.

Monday morning Miss Miles's friends were to bring her directly to the school-house ; so Rhoda was to go alone. Aunt Debby needed her longer than usual, and it was past nine when she started. Jotham was just going away with the horse and open wagon.

"Jump in, Rhoda," called he. "I can carry you as far as the turn in the road ; it will help some."

"How I do hope," said she, "that Sam Hobart won't be round anywhere ! for I shall be alone. The scholars will be all in."

"If you want, I'll carry you way there."

"No, it would take you too long."

A new idea struck Jotham ; it was quite a little walk from the turn to the school-house, but by jumping a few stone walls and ditches, one could cut across lots in much shorter time. As soon as Rhoda had gone a little way, Jotham jumped out, hitched Charley in a shady spot, and started across the fields. He spied Sam, before he came to the school-house, sitting on a stone, grinding his heels into the dirt, and pulling spears of grass ; he evidently could not make up his mind just what to do that would be most disagreeable.

Jotham kept out of sight behind the wall, and watched ; for he heard Rhoda's little steps hurrying along, to make up for lost time. Sam heard them, too, and saw her before Jotham did.

"Here," said Sam, "you stop, you red-headed almshouse brat! I'll learn you to try to go above me! You don't go to school this morning, I'll have you know. You just start back double-quick time, or I'll lick you."

Rhoda stopped, white with fear; but she had not time to speak or turn, when Jotham jumped over the wall.

"Run right along, Rhoda," said he, cheerfully. "I guess you'll go to school without any hindering."

She darted by with such a thankful, grateful look at Jotham!

"Now you start up the road double-quick," said he to Sam.

The ill-conditioned, lowering face glared at Jotham; but he saw something in the fine, open countenance that made him think he had better make a show of going; but he kept up a running grumble.

"You think you'll scare me, Jotham Harris; you can't do it. It's none o' your business, I'll have you to know. I tell you you can't bully me. I'll lick that red-headed —" But here he received a well-directed kick from behind, that stopped further speech for the time.

Jotham had an object in letting him go a little way from the school-house; and now they had come to a bend in the road that answered his purpose; and this staggerer of a kick was the first instalment of

what Jotham considered Sam's due. But Sam was a fighter, and turned without more words, and the two grappled. The dust flew as they struggled and swayed from side to side of the road. Sam was nearly as heavy as Jotham; but what could he do against the best wrestler in town? In less than a minute he was down, and receiving such a drubbing as he deserved.

"You'll lick a little girl — will you?" said Jotham, putting in blows, untouched himself, in spite of Sam's frantic efforts to hit back. "You've been telling long enough that folks must master you; if a woman can't, I'll let you know who can."

Sam now began to cry for quarter.

"Well," said Jotham, but still holding him down, "what'll you do if I let you get up?"

"I'll go home," whimpered Sam.

"Yes, and come back as soon as I am gone. No; you've got to do a precious sight more than that. You've got to promise never to say a word to Rhoda Thornton again but what you'd be willing for me to hear; and more'n that, you've got to go into school again, and tell Miss Miles that you're going to behave and take any place she tells you."

This was a bitter pill for Sam, who began to remonstrate.

"Very well," said Jotham, "you have n't had enough yet"; and he gave him another whack.

"Stop," said Sam; "I will."

"Well, now," said Jotham, "see you do it. If

you do all fair and square, I'll never tell anybody about this, and I'll be a good friend to you; but if you don't in every particular come up to what you promise, it won't be long before you'll get a drubbing that this one ain't a circumstance to; and I hope you'll do what is right about it, for your own sake, for Miss Miles says you're a first-rate scholar, if you only try."

"Well, I'll go in this afternoon," said Sam, completely quelled.

"Well, good-by. If you do, you'll find a friend in me; but remember."

Jotham had to drive Charley rather faster to make up for lost time; but he felt in hopes he had done a good morning's work. After school he was anxious to hear, but did not like to ask.

"I was so glad to see you this morning, Jotham!" said Rhoda; "did you come on purpose?"

"Yes, I thought I would."

"Sam came this afternoon all good as could be. He told Miss Miles he would go to the foot of the class."

If Rhoda had been a little older, she might have noticed a queer kind of a look on Jotham's face upon hearing this.

And Sam went on doing well. It was a kind of turning-point with him. He was the only child of a foolishly indulgent mother, who was a widow; and he had never before received just such a lesson as Jotham gave him. He had the good sense to

see that he was wrong, and Jotham was right. They became fast friends after this ; and when both were men, they often laughed over it.

But I must not linger too long in the little school, pleasant and instructive as it was. Jimmy was soon promoted to his pantaloons, and on pleasant days went with his sister. The home companionship of one so cultivated and lovely as Miss Miles, was of as much advantage to the little girl as the school instruction. Aunt Debby also seemed to enjoy the company of the teacher, while to Jotham it was of great benefit. He praised her so much, that Martha Easton, who usually liked every one, seemed singularly inclined to find fault with her, and to criticise her ; but when she found she was twenty-five years old, she also joined in the admiration of the others.

Miss Miles helped Rhoda in many ways. When the question of a winter dress came up, she told Aunt Debby that she had a blue dress which she was thinking what to do with, as she could not make it over for herself. It would be just the thing for Rhoda ; and by some carefully-worded suggestions she succeeded in having it made in a modern manner. There was enough of it for a sack ; and Jotham furnished gray squirrel skins to make a muff and trim the sack ; and somewhere from Miss Miles's stores came a bit of blue silk, that, trimmed with the same fur, made a charming little hood. Miss Miles felt repaid for the trouble she had taken,

on hearing the satisfied little sigh Rhoda gave when she saw all the suit laid out on one of the spare-room beds, with a new pair of shoes and white mittens, of her own knitting, beside it.

And Jimmy was gainer by her also. Her friend, Mrs. Winter, had a little boy about a year older, and an outgrown suit of his ("good as new," Aunt Debby said) was sent as a present to him; and it was found much less work to make his other clothes like these than after Jotham's old patterns. Jimmy did not care himself; he trotted round just as contented in pantaloons down to his heels as in shorter ones. He spent half his days with Mrs. Speers, whose health really seemed improved in waiting upon him; and when he had mastered his letters, the good couple were loud in their admiration.

So the winter wore on. Vacations Miss Miles spent at Northfield Centre, and Rhoda sewed rags, and did numberless duties to Miss Debby's satisfaction, who had never regretted taking the children from the poor-farm.

Miss Miles had engaged to keep the school for the school year, which would end in May. Her teaching had given such satisfaction, that the trustee wished to re-engage her; but she declined, telling Aunt Debby that there had been reasons for her leaving her city school. Now it seemed best for her to return again, as her salary there was much larger; but that she should always remember with great pleasure her eight months spent in



"NOW YOU START UP THE ROAD DOUBLE QUICK." Page 76.

Southfield. She gave Rhoda Miss Edgeworth's "Parent's Assistant," and a beautiful spotted muslin for her summer dress; and with good advice to the children, and kind farewells to all, she went away

How dull and empty the house seemed without her! A little note came to Aunt Debby, telling of her safe arrival, and then for a long time they heard no more. Rhoda had formed a pleasant friendship with Nancy and Phebe Brown; and an afternoon visit to them, now and then, or their return visits to her, were her only excitement.

About this time she heard that Lizzy Carr had left the poorhouse. Some relative had claimed her, and taken her away. The other members of the household remained about the same. Mr. Harmon, happening to be going near there, called and told them. He was astonished to find them so much grown and improved.

One day, in the latter part of summer, Mrs. Winter came to see them, bringing great news. She said there was no longer any Miss Miles; she had become a Mrs. Fields. Mrs. Winter had been at the wedding, and the bride wished her to be sure and tell Miss Nichols all about it. It was a long story; but we will make a short one of it, and tell that Miss Miles was the only child of Dr. Miles, a famous physician, and in her girlhood had enjoyed all the luxuries of wealth; but unfortunate speculations had swallowed up the old

doctor's property, and at his death she was left penniless. She immediately began to support herself by teaching. There was a student of her father's, one Mr. Fields, between whom and herself there had been a long attachment.

Through some misunderstanding, he had left the city, and she had not heard from him for a long time before her father's death. It was his return to the city that caused her to come to Southfield; and, thinking he had again gone abroad, she returned; but they had met, and all had been explained.

"And now," said Mrs. Winter, "I suppose they are half way across the Atlantic."

"Well," said Aunt Debby, "it's quite like a story. Some people have such things happen to them. Now, I've always lived right here; never went forty miles away from home, I suppose."

"Are these portraits of your family?" said Mrs. Winter, looking at the staring faces on the wall.

"Yes, I had five brothers and sisters, and all died young but me; and now I've not a relation living, nearer than Jotham, my cousin's son. I used to feel lonesome, thinking of it; but now I am getting old, I think how many relations I am going to meet, not leave, before long."

Mrs. Winter thought all stories were not of those who went abroad; but some who staid at home

might have griefs and hopes to tell. She left them, promising to come again. Her little Arthur had been having such a fine time with Jimmy, who played host very well, that he went away reluctantly.

CHAPTER V.

AN OCTOBER DAY.

THE school funds seemed to be at a low ebb that autumn ; for September days clear and golden, with nights cool and damp, went by one after another, until October was the reigning month ; and then, without pause, as the way of months is, that marched along. And Aunt Debby's work went on about as unceasingly ; long strings of quartered apples festooned the sunny sides of the house and shed ; sweet corn cut from the cob dried on platforms made of boards resting on barrels ; every window seat showed rows of jars, and tumblers filled with rich-tinted jellies and jams, taking a final touch from the sun ; and each day had some odor of pickle or preserve or cider apple-sauce boiling, peculiar to itself, interspersed with airings and cleanings that the whole house was taking piecemeal. In all these performances Rhoda was Aunt Debby's right hand ; and by night the young feet grew heavy, and she could not help a wistful looking back to the bright school days. Towards the latter part of the month the hazy Indian sum-

mer days came. Maples, birch and elms, in company with all their friends and relations high and low, had decked themselves in most brilliant array, although their glory was fast fading; every wind showering down some of their fluttering ornaments. On one of these days Jotham had been away a few miles to find a market for his Thanksgiving poultry, which were strutting around the yard heavy and important, little thinking, poor things, of the last Thursday in November. Aunt Debby had been in the garret all day, and Rhoda and Jimmy had been so much interested in the strange old things they had assisted in moving and assorting, that the day had not seemed so long. The collection of wheels for spinning, quilling, and reeling had been to the little boy a mine of delight; and they had hummed and whirled under his restless hands, more merrily than they had for years before. He had to turn over an old bread tray, large enough for a cradle, to stand upon, while he operated upon the great wool wheel; but the little linen one was more to his mind; that had to spin imaginary flax all day by spells.

By the time the shortening day began to darken, all was swept and orderly, and the old garret was left to rest in quiet, save for scampering rats, until the spring cleaning should come. Then downstairs they went to get supper, which being done, they sat down for the first time in the day to rest, and wait for Jotham. The rattle of the wagon

wheels was soon heard far up the road, sounding distinct in the evening air. Jimmy ran out to open the gate, and Rhoda leaned against the window to watch. The great, round, harvest moon shone down on the landscape brightly, the dew glittered on the grass, and everything looked so white and still; the very crickets were shutting up their chirping until spring again, although one hidden fellow, held his own against the tea-kettle, somewhere round Aunt Debby's kitchen hearth — he kept it up almost as though he had heard of John Perrybringle and Dot. But Rhoda was so tired that it looked cold and lonely to her; and the chirping and singing in doors only sounded sad and depressing, although life just at that moment seemed much less bright than the moonlight. She hardly saw the wagon go by to the barn, and only turned to the room again when she heard Jotham come in. His quick eye saw the pale, careworn look in her face, and his kind heart began at once to cast about for some pleasant thing to drive it away.

"Well, Aunt Debby," said he, as he sat down to supper, and began to store away the cold beef and bread in generous mouthfuls, "Charley and I have had a trot to-day. We've had pretty good luck, however, but I guess we'll have to go it again to-morrow. Can't you and Rhoda and Jimmy go too? I've got to go to several places, and it's kind of lonesome trailing round without any body to speak to all day."

"Why, where have you got to go to-morrow?" said she.

"Well, you see, I found over at the 'Centre,' a man from the city looking up a good lot of fowls for one of the city markets. He wants four or five hundred pounds, and he'll pay two cents a pound more than any body round here would; so I made a bargain to have all ready for him a week before Thanksgiving, — turkeys, chickens, ducks, geese and all."

"Not the peacock?" said Jimmy, in a fright.

"No, I don't think we'll sell him; I guess he'd be rather a tough customer."

"I'm glad you made such a good bargain," said Aunt Debby; "but what have you got to go to-morrow for?"

"Why, as I was coming home I met Sam Miller, and he stopped me to ask what I was going to do with my fowls; he said he had n't got any to sell himself, but he asked on his father's account. Old Moses, you know, over on the Warren place; he's got a likely lot of turkeys he says, but he's so old he can't get round much; and if I'd go round there, I could buy them of him so as to make enough to pay for my trouble; so I told him I'd ride round to-morrow. Then I want to tell Daniel Easton that the man will be round to see him day after to-morrow, to see his poultry; and then, last of all, you know how you were wishing for some wild grapes the other day; well, over on the cross-road between

Mr. Bruce and Mr. Battey's farms, I came across a vine that beats all I've seen for years. They hang there in bushels. How they've missed being picked I don't see; but I suppose there's few people going that way, and what do are like me with nothing to put them in; they've hung so long they are just as ripe as they can be. I was sorry I hadn't a basket or something; but I don't think but what they'll be there to-morrow. So I guess it will be a pleasant ride all round, so you'd better go."

"I don't think I can," said Aunt Debby. "I must see to tying up and putting away what I've got done up, and I have so many things drying, I don't think I will go; but I do want some grapes. I hope they ain't picked. Rhoda and Jimmy may go if you want them. You'll want something to eat put up, won't you?"

"No; I guess we'll fetch up at Mr. Easton's about dinner-time; but a few doughnuts won't come amiss to Jimmy, for we must start bright and early, soon as we can get through breakfast, or we shan't do all we are planning to."

He looked over at Rhoda. How her eyes shone and cheeks glowed! She had forgotten all about how tired and lonely she felt a little while before.

The breakfast dishes were washed and away the next morning by the time the sun was fairly up, and Jotham soon stood beside Charley at the door. Before the start Aunt Debby put in two, large

baskets. "You ought to carry some grapes to Miss Easton," said she, "so I'll put in two."

"All right," said Jotham; "there's enough to fill both, if nobody's found them since yesterday, and I don't believe but what they hang there safe and ripe."

The dew lay heavy on the grass as they rode out of the yard and they were soon off "over the hills and far away." The corn stood stacked in the fields as they rode along, looking, as the children pleased themselves by thinking, like old women starting away for a walk. In some fields the great, yellow pumpkins yet laid ungathered. "Don't you wish they were great lumps of gold, sister," said Jimmy, "and you and Jotham and I could pick up as many as we wanted?"

"We'd load up old Charley till he could n't hardly pull, would n't we?" said Jotham, "so that we'd have to get out and walk and push the wagon, and turn round and go right home again."

"I should n't want to go right home again," said Jimmy. "I guess we'd leave them till we come back this afternoon."

"We should n't find many when we came back, if they were gold," said Rhoda.

"No, I bet not," laughed Jotham. "Old Mr. Bruce and his wife Miry would tug pretty hard all day. They'd have the old, crooked-horned oxen out; and if they war n't all picked up by dark, he'd mount guard with his blunderbuss all night."

"What's a blunderfuss?" said Jimmy, who always got new words wrong.

"O, it's a kind of old fire-arm that kicks so when it's used that it hurts the one that holds it more than what it's aimed at. But there's the old man himself, thrashing out his beans in the barn."

The barn stood opposite the house, the broad doors opening on the road. He and his hired boy were swinging the flails steadily, but they seemed glad to stop when Jotham drove up, and came to the door to talk a few minutes.

"You've got a good crop of beans this year; I should think," said Jotham.

"Well, fair; calculate I will have about twenty bushels," answered Mr. Bruce. "How's your aunt this morning?"

"She's well. How's your folks?"

"'Bout as usual; my wife has a touch of asthma 'most every fall. Last year she went down to Lorinda's, and somehow the change — it's near the shore you know — made her miss the turn. I tried to have her go this year, and Lorinda wrote; but 't wan't no use, she's such a worker; she thought the apples and corn war n't half dried last year. Old Aunt Phebe came up and did it while she was gone. So we could n't start her; and last night she had a smart touch of short breath. Well, Rhoda, you in a hurry for a school to begin again?"

"Yes, indeed; When do you think it will?"

"I'm afraid not until week after Thanksgiving."

"That's seems a long time to wait," said she.

"Yes; but it will hold longer in the spring for being so late now. Where are you going to-day, Jotham?"

"O, we've got to go all round over in North-field, and it's time we jogged along. Good morning."

"Good morning," said Mr. Bruce; and they soon heard the thump, thump, of the flails again. They saw Miry out, hanging up her strings of apples. There was such a heap of squashes and pumpkins shining in the sun in one place, that the children concluded they would need no more if they were gold.

"I wish you had asked him to let me see that thing you told about," said Jimmy.

"What thing?" asked Jotham.

"Why, I can't think of the name; but it was something that had legs and arms."

"Legs and arms? What does he mean?" said Jotham to Rhoda.

"I am sure I don't know," she replied. "What do you want to see, Jimmy?"

"Why, that thing Jotham told about that kicks; I wanted to see it kick."

"O, the blunderbuss; why that is a kind of a gun." So Jotham had to tell him all about it, how it looked and how it kicked; and before the story was finished they were driving through the cross-road where they were to find the grapes.

It was a rough, up-hill, stony bit of country road, but so filled with beautiful colors, and pleasant things. This morning Charley's footsteps were muffled by the gorgeous scarlet, yellow, and brown leaves that covered the track ; great chestnut-trees had cast their fruit and opened burs to the ground, and frisky squirrels were busy gleaning their winter stores ; partridges and quails rose whirring from the stubble as they drove along, and ferns, vines, and bushes, all seemed to vie with each other in beauty ; and best of all when the grape-vine was reached, it was untouched and the great purple branches hung ripe and heavy, ready to drop into the baskets. Soon both the rough baskets looked like pictures of offerings to the god of wine, with the hanging fruit heaped and drooping round them. Rhoda and Jimmy found them nice to eat, although it was rather a gulp to swallow one of the great pulps. After the baskets would hold no more, no matter how coaxed, Rhoda picked some bright sumach sprays, and some long trails of scarlet woodbine, and with these, spires of golden rod, and clusters of purple asters, she decorated the old baskets until they were gorgeous in color and beauty. And in finding these she came across some of her favorites, the lovely fringed gentian. Then they checked up Charley, who had been feeding by the road, and started on towards Northfield, and in due time they turned in at Daniel Easton's great gate. Mr. Easton, like Mr. Bruce, was busy in his barn ;

but he came out when he saw them, with a hearty "Well, well, and how do you all do? Drive on, right up to the house, and I'll be in presently."

But Jotham, now he had got there, seemed a little shy of hurrying up to the house, and began to tell his errand.

"O, go on, go on," said Mr. Easton, squinting up at the sun, "it's past eleven now; dinner will be ready soon. Carry these small folks up to the women folks, and then when Charley is unharnessed and having a feed, we'll find time to talk."

Mrs. Easton and Martha were never put back by unexpected company; and they welcomed the children as heartily as the good man had done. Jimmy was soon occupied with a young puppy in the yard, which rolled and tumbled and yelped in agonies of awkward play, to the satisfaction of Jimmy and himself, while Rhoda sat down in the kitchen to talk with Mrs. Easton and Martha while they prepared to serve the dinner. She had been there several times since her first memorable visit, and felt very well acquainted. She had just had time to tell of Aunt Debby's picklings and preservings, and the luck attending each enterprise, when the tall old clock in the next room began to tell twelve, and soon the contents of the mighty dinner-pot were sorted and steaming on the table. Before Mr. Easton stood the great, blue platter with its round of corned beef, and block of firm, home-raised pork, while the array of vegetables

that faced his wife, might have almost daunted a less portly dame. But she was equal to it, and deftly furnished each plate with its spoonful of golden squash, silver turnip, emerald cabbage, ruby beet, and pearl-white potato, until it looked almost as brilliant as Rhoda's grape baskets. After they had done full justice to all, including the pumpkin and apple pies with sage cheese, they left the table, and Jotham brought in a basket of the grapes.

"Why I am real glad to have these, Jotham," said Mrs. Easton; "somebody has picked those that grew over in our intervale, and I'd 'most given up having any to preserve. How handsome they look; it 'most seems a pity to disturb them — but it must be done; Martha, take them out, and empty the basket."

Jotham had to help her carry them, they were so heavy; and it was some time, Rhoda thought, before they found anything to hold them. But this pleasant visit must come to an end, and at length they were ready to start again. Jimmy had found a horse-chestnut tree, and his pockets were distended until he looked deformed, with the great, handsome, worthless nuts, always so dear to children's hearts.

It was past three o'clock when they drove up the avenue of the Warren place, and Rhoda decided that she and Jimmy would not get out of the wagon; but old Mr. Miller was slow and lame

and talkative, and it took him so long to show the poultry and decide upon selling it, that his wife came out and insisted upon their coming in, and Jotham approving, they did. The brisk old lady brought out a pitcher of sweet cider just pressed ; and Jimmy finding that cider was being made, was soon out by the mill watching.

"This is a very large house," said Rhoda.

"Yes, dear, it is," said Mrs. Miller ; "rather too large for two old folks like my husband and me. It's kind of lonesome to sit out here in this kitchen, with all the rest of the house shut up but two or three rooms out here ; but there used to be folks enough to fill it up. My mother used to know about them all, and tell me."

"Is n't the rest of the house furnished?" asked Rhoda.

"No, not much ; there's lots of old things here, but nothing but a bedroom really furnished in the body part of the house. It gets dreadful musty, sometimes, being shut up. I've had some of the windows opened to-day, it's so clear ; but the sun is beginning to go down some, and I must shut them. Don't you want to go round with me while I do it?"

As Jotham was still away, Rhoda readily assented, and they went up the broad stairs to the great hall in the second story. Two or three old pictures hung there, but it did look desolate and still enough. In the large rooms, mostly uncar-

peted, stood heavy, claw-footed, mahogany chairs and tables, with high, carved-post bedsteads, whose testers, now quaint and bare, once supported rich, heavy curtains. Two portraits stood facing the wall in one room, and Rhoda felt she would like to see them, but dared not ask; but the kind old lady seemed to notice her wistful look, and turned them to the light. "Miss Esther has got most of the pictures, but there's a few left. These two are Old Colonel Warren's sons, Miss Esther's uncles William and Joseph. This is William; he was wild, and was thrown from his horse when he was half drunk, they say — and this one's Joseph; he did n't marry to suit his father, and he would n't have anything more to say to him, nor leave him any of his money. So I suppose there's something about it — Miss Esther don't want them so much as the rest."

"Rhoda looked at two handsome, haughty, young figures. They were dressed in the fashion of more than half a century before, but with youth and pride looking from the blue eyes, and with bright auburn hair shadowing the white foreheads. William's was the handsomest face, but there was a strong family resemblance. Rhoda looked long at them, and turned away looking puzzled. "They are ever so old pictures, I expect," said she; "but it sort of seems as though I had seen them some time or other."

"I guess you never did," said the old lady;

"it's nigh on sixty years since they died, I expect." As she was closing one window, she said: "There, over there, is the burying-ground. We had a time getting this house so there could be a funeral here, where Walter Warren died."

"I was here that day," said Rhoda."

"Why, do tell!" and she did tell; and by that time the windows were all closed, and they went down. It seemed to Rhoda as if they went through a hundred rooms; they turned and went up and down so much. "There's one thing," said Sally, "it's the most awful house for noises you ever see; the trampings and bangings I hear, are past telling."

"Then I would n't tell of 'em," said old Moses, coming in just then. "If ever there was an old house as full of rats as this is, that there war n't noises in, it would be queer."

"Well, it don't sound much like rats sometimes, and you know it," said she. "You must come over again. I wish I had just such a little girl to live with me, tell your aunt," said she to Jotham.

Now the bargain was made, they hurried away; for the sun was slipping down to the west very fast, and they did not want Aunt Debby to watch so long as to grow anxious. Long before they got home the fair, lady moon was smiling down in their faces, but she looked much more cheerful than she did the night before to Rhoda.

"That's a splendid farm, that Warren place,"

said Jotham ; " it seems a pity to let it stand so uncared for ; old Moses can't do much."

" Did you know I went, 'most all over the house when Mrs. Miller was shutting the windows? "

" Did you? Well, what did you see? "

" O, rooms and rooms — and pictures of two men that died ever so long ago — and it seemed to me as though I had seen somebody that looked like them."

" Maybe you have," said he.

" I would like to go over the rooms again ; they did not seem so lonesome to me. I liked them."

Jimmy was getting very tired and sleepy by this time, but Jotham and Rhoda sang him his favorite song about how —

" The old jackdaw and the young jackdaw,
They both got onto the cow.
Said the young jackdaw to the old jackdaw,
' I can ride as well as thou.'
Said the old jackdaw to the young jackdaw,
' You are a little ninny.'
Said the young jackdaw to the old jackdaw,
' If I can't, I'll bet you a guinea.' "

" I am so obliged to you, Jotham, for taking us to-day," said Rhoda, as they rode into the yard.

" I am very much obliged to you for your company, Miss Thornton," said he, pinching her cheek.

CHAPTER VI.

THE QUILTING PARTY.

THE next three years of Rhoda's life must be briefly noticed. They went by calmly, and with little variety. She was growing into a tall girl, nearly fourteen years old. Aunt Debby had become rather infirm, but was as bright and decided in her own way as ever. Jimmy, now seven years old, attended school regularly. Aunt Debby had given Rhoda the same privilege, no matter how inconvenient to herself it might be. -

Jotham was still, as he always had been, Rhoda's firm and faithful friend. He was now twenty-three years old, and gradually Aunt Debby had given up the management of the farm to him. Nowadays they seldom saw much of him Sunday evenings; but pretty Martha Easton could have told where he spent them. Aunt Debby was glad Jotham had chosen a girl so thrifty. It was understood that he was to inherit the farm; and his aunt often said she could not have borne to think of any lazy, shiftless woman coming after her, to let things run

down ; but there was no immediate prospect of Martha's coming.

Mrs. Winter had also been a kind friend to Rhoda, often inviting both her and Jimmy to visit her. Mrs. Fields still continued abroad, but sent affectionate messages once in a while to Miss Nichols by Mrs. Winter ; and once she sent home presents by a friend. Rhoda's heart was gladdened by a bright, Roman scarf ; Aunt Debby received a fine wooden bread-plate, that she thought a very queer-looking thing, although gratified by the remembrance ; Jimmy had a carved, wooden chamois, that he placed on the parlor mantel, almost breaking it and his own neck in clambering up to that mighty elevation ; Jotham carried a pretty, little model of a Swiss chalet to Martha.

During this summer, Rhoda, besides her regular duties, had braided straw, earning enough to pay her tuition for six months at the Northfield Academy, which was now well kept and in a flourishing condition. Mrs. Winter had told her that she should be glad to have her stay through the week with her ; but Rhoda knew that Aunt Debby needed her, and Jotham had arranged to carry her half the way in the morning, and to meet her at night, except in stormy weather, when she could accept Mrs. Winter's kind offer. She was getting to be very skilful with her needle, and her correct taste and observation assisted in making the most of the very plain, substantial clothing Aunt Debby

thought sufficient. So she looked very neat in her new print dress and white apron, as she started with Jotham on the first Monday in September. It was rather an ordeal. She knew that all, both scholars and teacher, would be strangers to her. She had never been taught by a master before ; and this master, whom she had seen at church, looked rather stern, she thought.

And, then, Fanny Folger attended the school. It was a singular thing that these two little girls, who had never spoken to each other, should have so pitted themselves one against the other. It was Fanny's fault, however ; for Rhoda was so ready to admire what was pretty and dainty, that she would from the first have been Fanny's humble little admirer ; but when, Sunday after Sunday, the haughty little beauty proclaimed by action what might have been put into words like these, — "I am a fine-dressed, elegant, pretty miss, and you are a coarse-dressed clod-hopper of a girl ; therefore I am better than you, and you should understand it."

Rhoda's independent little soul asserted it, and answered back, —

"No ; I don't accept any such thing. I feel myself just as good as you, and with just as much right in the world as you ; you cannot stare me down, Miss Fanny."

Latterly some dislike of Rhoda had mingled with Fanny's disdain. Mrs. Winter was the great

lady of Northfield Centre, and Fanny would have been glad to stand well in her good graces; but the little girl was an only child, over-indulged by her widowed mother, and Mrs. Winter had no fancy for her example among her children who were younger. Hence Fanny made no headway in visiting there; and to see this despised Rhoda Thornton and her bullet-headed brother staying there days at a time was very irritating to her, who seldom had found her wishes interfered with. With all these things to ponder over, Rhoda rode very soberly along.

"You rather dread it — don't you?" said Jotham, after a half mile of silence.

"Yes," said Rhoda; "I can't seem to make any plans, you know, until I get there; and I can't help thinking; and it all don't amount to anything."

"Well, things bother and trouble me so sometimes; but I 'most always find that it don't pay to have any planning about it. When I went to see old Mr. Battey about the pigs last week, I knew how he always haggled and beat down; so I was making up how I'd prove to him that they were worth more 'n I asked; but when I got there he warn't at home, and his son traded with me. He's a kind of a happy-go-easy fellow, that'll spend the old man's money as soon as he gets it; and he said the pigs were dirt cheap, and paid out the money quick as need be. So I came home feeling I hadn't got enough for them."

"Well, all I have got to do is, to learn all I can these six months," said she; "for it's doubtful if I ever go to school any more. Aunt Debby grows feeble, I think; and I must stay at home, and take more of the care. I don't feel right at leaving Jimmy on her hands so much now."

"I would n't trouble about that; for she sets by that little scamp more 'n she 'd be willing for anybody to know. She'll let him do things she wouldn't let me when I was a shaver. I'll hear them talking, talking by the hour together, when I am out in the barn, and the kitchen door's open; and she'll laugh out as young-sounding sometimes when he says anything funny. And John Speers and his wife think there never was such a child; they have him down there so much, that he can't tire Aunt Debby. She's almost jealous he does go so much."

So chatting along, Rhoda forgot her worries, which was what Jotham wanted.

"There, I will get down here. You need not go any farther; it's only a mile now."

"Well, jump out. I'll start from home about five to-night, and meet you wherever you may be."

Jotham looked after her. "She's a good little thing," thought he; "and she grows real pretty, and like a lady. She shall have a home with Martha and me as long as she needs one."

There was no need of planning, as Jotham said; she had to pass Dr. Winter's, and at the gate stood

Mrs. Winter and the teacher, Mr. Greene. The kind lady was just telling him about his new pupil when she came up.

"O, here she is now! This is Rhoda Thornton, Mr. Greene; and this is your teacher, Rhoda."

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Rhoda; and I hope we shall sustain a pleasant relation together as pupil and teacher," said Mr. Greene.

He was a pleasant man; but many years of school-room life had made him rather formal. Rhoda blushed, but made out to thank him, and to say she was glad to see him.

"Leave your dinner-basket here, Rhoda, and come here at noon," said Mrs. Winter. "Luly wants to see you very much about some important matter of doll's dresses." Luly was her little girl, about eight years old.

So Rhoda had the honor of walking to school with the teacher. When they came to the school-house, several of the girls were on the steps, and Mr. Greene introduced her to them. Fanny Folger was among them, and for the first time the little girls spoke; then they all went into school.

Rhoda was found as advanced in most studies as the other scholars of her age; and her kind, generous disposition soon made her a great favorite among the girls. Fanny tried hard to head an opposition party, and create a prejudice against her, even going to the unlady-like, as well as unkind, length of hinting at her unknown parentage,

and of her having been taken from the poorhouse. Rhoda was aware of all that was going on against her; but, although it was a hard thing to always restrain her feelings, she went on in a straightforward course. She studied hard, helped others all she could honorably, and was full of fun and frolic out of school, inventing new amusements for noons and recesses, until she fairly drove her adversary away. Fanny came to school one day, not many weeks after the term commenced, and informed the girls that her mother had concluded to go to the city for the winter, so as to send her to a fashionable school there, as the academy was getting so common and of such a low grade. Sure enough, her foolishly fond mother had been teased into breaking up her home for the winter, and going to the city, as Fanny said. If she had expected to be missed, she would have been disappointed, could she have looked in after her departure; it was with a sense of relief that her companions felt she was gone; for her home education had made her so tyrannical, that there was little comfort with her in school.

The fall went on pleasantly, although it was hard work for Rhoda. She was up in the morning before daylight, and did the burden of the housework; then dressed, and with Jotham's help, reached school at nine. At half past four she started for home again, worked until after supper, then studied until nine, and crept into bed, tired

enough. But it was better than all study, or all work; and she grew and throve under it.

The first term closed in the latter part of November, and Thanksgiving week was vacation. Thanksgiving was always observed busily and merrily in Southfield and adjoining towns. The year before this, Aunt Debby's family dined with the Eastons; but this year Aunt Debby insisted that they should visit her. Mrs. Easton thought it would be too much of a task for her old friend; but Aunt Debby would listen to no arguments against it.

"Another year," said she, "I may be offering my thanksgiving in the other country, where I have so many to join me; and I want my old house warmed up once more while I am in it."

Aunt Debby's life had been one of acts, not words, and it was seldom she spoke in this way; but when she did, in these latter days, it was with a cheerfulness and pleasure that showed that the change she foresaw had nothing of dread or gloom connected with it.

"Well," said Martha, "it seems as though we ought to do something that week, if we go from home Thanksgiving-day."

"Why don't you have your pink-and-white bed-spread quilted?" said her mother. "You could have that done Tuesday. It would make a very pleasant time."

So invitations were duly given to about twelve

or fifteen girls — of whom Rhoda was one (although she and the Browns were younger than the others) — and to a corresponding number of young men and boys, who were to come after dark, in time for the supper, but to allow the daylight hours to finish the quilt.

Rhoda was so pleased and excited, that her eyes shone like stars when she came down-stairs, dressed in her best, to be carried over by Jotham, who was privileged to be round all the afternoon, though informed he must not be seen round the quilt.

Rhoda had arrived at the dignity of a brown merino this fall, and Mrs. Winter had given her a black silk apron for a birthday present; so, with that and blue ribbons of her own earning, she looked well. She wore her hair in a wavy crop, tied back with a ribbon; she carried her thimble; for she could quilt with the most expert. She quilted beside Nancy and Phebe; and their tongues flew, and they laughed and giggled in true, little-girl fashion.

"Only think, Rhoda," said Nancy; "our old Sabrina got terribly scared last night. She went over to her sister's, and was coming back, about nine o'clock —"

"She's a superstitious, old woman, anyhow," said Phebe.

"Don't interrupt me," said Nancy, "or you'll spoil my story. Well, as she was coming along by the graveyard, she says she saw a ghost sitting on

a headstone; and now she thinks she's had a warning, and is going to die herself."

"Is her sister the old black woman that lives at the tavern?" asked Rhoda.

"Yes; the same one."

"Maybe she did see one," said Rhoda. "I saw a ghost once."

"You know you didn't," said Phebe.

"Well, I'll tell you about it, and you'll see." So she told the story of poor Uncle Zeb's ghost with great humor and effect, acting out Susy and Lizy, and not hiding her own fear.

"You ought not to laugh at such things, girls," said Martha's Aunt Charity, a long-faced old lady, who was general superintendent of the quilting, being famous for her skill in marking, whether herring-bone, orange-peel, or any other style was desired.

"There's a great many things we can't understand here," continued she, sighing.

"What kind of things?" asked Phebe, who liked to hear of marvels, and wished her to tell some of the mysteries she had on hand to deal out.

"I don't say much about such matters here, because sister Easton and Martha always pooh at them, and are unbelievers in them," said she looking rather reproachfully at sister Easton and Martha.

"What did they pooh at?" said Nancy, looking awe-struck, to encourage Miss Charity to continue,

but pulling Rhoda's dress under the quilting-frame.

"Well, I told them about what brother Obadiah's wife had told to her down to the Cape, where she came from. They both laughed as though it was a thing to laugh at."

"Do tell us. We won't laugh, I'll warrant," said Nancy.

Aunt Charity was as anxious to relate as they were to hear.

"Well, down to the Cape, where she used to live, was a lonesome kind of a place. The houses are a good ways apart, and it's kind of stormy and windy a good deal of the time. Drusilla said she'd often think she heard folks screaming and talking away down the road; and she'd find it was only the wind, or, at any rate, there was nobody to be seen. The sea beats in on the coast, and wrecks used to be all round there after any hard storm. Well, she said it always was a place for witches and warlocks; and in old, Indian times witches used to cut up more frightful there than anywhere else. One night, there was a husking at one of the houses, and all the neighbors round went; but one family that lived down on the farthest point of land did n't get started quite so early as they meant to, and were hurrying along, for fear they should lose all the fun. The night was cloudy, and dark as a pocket. When they came to the next house, they were surprised to

find it lighted up; so they went up to see why they had n't gone, and to take their company, if they'd been belated, like themselves; but when they got so they could see into the windows" (here Aunt Charity's voice lowered), "what did they see but the table out in the kitchen, and as much as twenty witches standing round it, and passing a candle from hand to hand as swift as lightning; and, instead of going out, it only burned brighter, and the eyes of every one of them was set, and looked like lead buttons. The folks stood looking in, so scared they could not think what to do; but at last, one young fellow, who war n't afraid of anything, give a loud knock on the window, and the light went out in a twinkling, and all was still and dark as ever anybody see. So they went on to the house where the husking was, and there was all the folks that lived in the house where the witches were seen; they'd been there for an hour or two."

"Is that all?" asked Nancy, when Aunt Charity stopped speaking.

"Ain't that enough?" said she, indignantly. "To think of houses being carried on in that way, when folks are out, ain't very pleasant to me."

"What always made me laugh when Aunt Charity told that story," said Martha, "was to think that a great company of witches, who ought to be able to have all kinds of power, should have to wait until folks went away to have a house to per-

form in ; and then, while they were doing such a foolish thing as passing that candle round seemed to be, just tapping on the window would scare them off. I should n't think they were much to be afraid of, if I believed in them, which I don't."

Aunt Charity began to bridle up and prepare to tell more astounding things ; but it was growing dusk, and the quilt was almost done, and she must see that no stray corner remained unquilted ; then it was ripped from the frame, well shaken, and admired, and put away for the night.

Now the young men and boys began to come in, rather bashful and still at first ; but supper would cure that ; and what a supper it was ! — a great pink-and-white boiled ham, and chicken pie, with the flakiest of crust, trimmed off with twists and knobs of the same, that made nice morsels to crush and crackle in the mouth ; warm brown bread and soda-biscuit ; sage cheese of Mrs. Easton's own making ; and pickled peaches and preserved peaches ; crab-apple jelly standing firm and clear ; and boiled custards, each with a little snow-fall of beaten white of egg, while resting on that was a little crimson spot of jelly ; then the tea and coffee, with such cream, and "silver-cake and golden-cake and fruit-cake," as Rhoda enumerated to Aunt Debby the next day. And after that, games and riddles and songs. Rhoda came out quite bright ; for she told the most difficult riddles and conundrums, and guessed more than

any one else; and though rather too bashful to sing alone, she sang with Jotham very satisfactorily. She told Jotham on the way home that "she did not believe she should ever have such a good time again"; and it is rather doubtful if she ever did.

But the next day, after telling all the delights of it to Aunt Debby, Rhoda had to put on a wide apron, and go into sage and onion in a masterly manner. Jotham had been fattening a turkey for the eventful day, and the great fellow weighed, when dressed, sixteen pounds; but Aunt Debby considered him a nucleus round which to gather other good things. Four plump chickens laid down their lives in honor of the day, while a ham, already boiled, was being decorated by Rhoda, cloves being stuck in like nails, and alternate spots of red and black pepper between the same. Jotham had gone off to procure an ally, to assist in this great dinner; and who do you think it was? Why, Susy Blake—poor, cross-eyed, half-foolish Susy. Rhoda, when Aunt Debby was wondering whom she could get to wash vegetables and dishes, suggested that Susy Blake could do that work well. So word was sent to the poor-farm, and an answer received, that she was still there, and Miss Nichols could have her as long as she wanted her. So Jotham and Jimmy had started early, and were soon seen driving into the yard with Susy sitting very upright on the back

seat. Rhoda went to meet her, and her mouth widened into a broad laugh of delight.

"Why, Susy, this is you, looking just the same as ever."

"Yes," laughed Susy; "it's me, and I do look just the same, I know, 'cause I look in your glass every day. I didn't know 't was Jimmy, 'cause he's so big; and now I don't hardly know it's you, 'cause you're so big;" but when she got into Miss Debby's presence, her laugh ceased, and she sat down on the edge of a chair in her old manner, and stared at Aunt Debby until she could hardly help laughing, and whispered to Rhoda, —

"Do get her something to do; for I cannot stand it much longer."

Rhoda started her in picking over cranberries and beating eggs, and she got along very well, forgetting herself now and then when she stopped to take a long, solemn stare at Aunt Debby; but she did not dare even look at Jotham; backing round and round, to keep her face away from him, while he as persistently tried to look at her, for the sake of seeing her gyrations. But how she admired everything! When she saw the pumpkin, mince, and apple pies in the store-room, she was almost overcome; and as she followed Rhoda round, assisting in the final dusting and touching up for to-morrow, she kept up a continual murmur: "O, ain't that pretty! O, my! this ain't much like Miss Harmon's! Ain't I glad I'm here!"

But when she came to the parlor, and saw the portraits, her admiration culminated; she sat down.

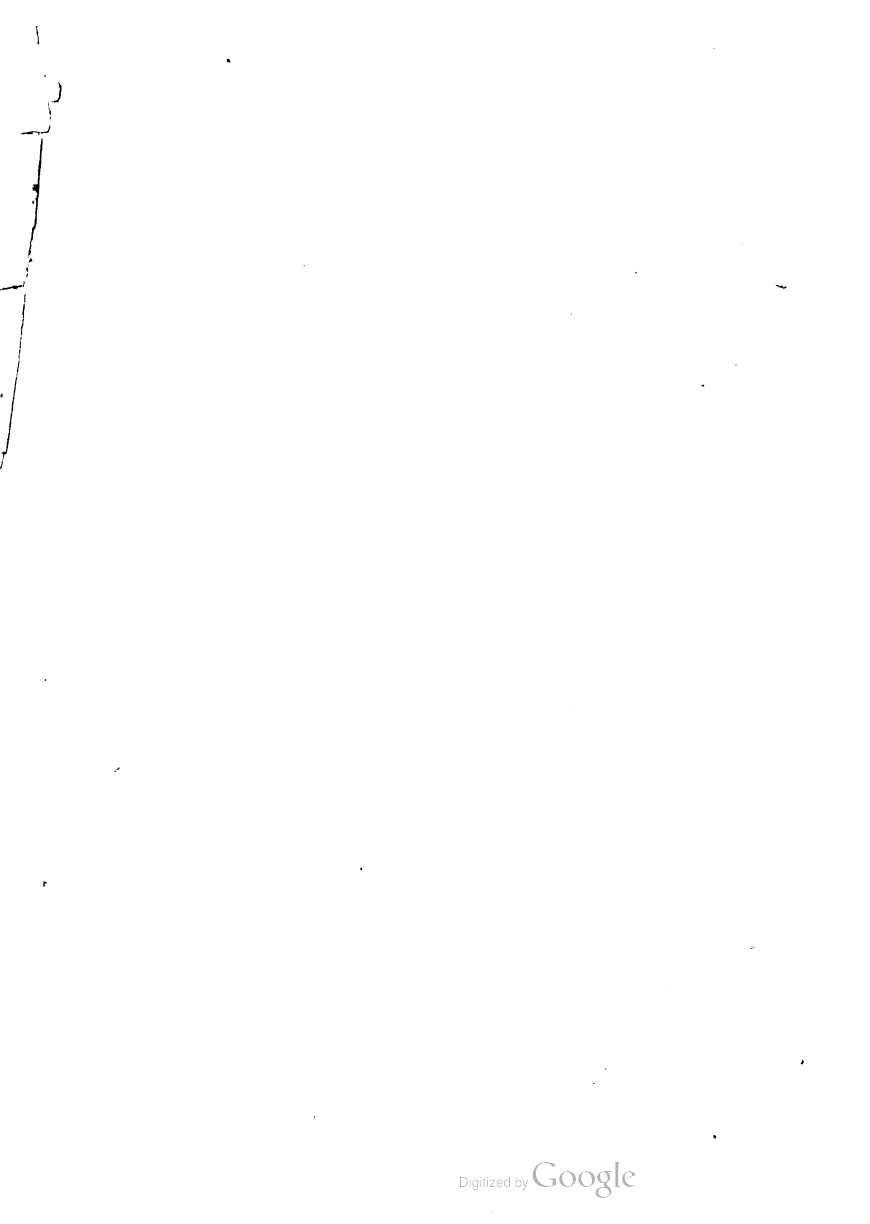
"O, just let me look at them! I never see anything like them afore."

Very few had seen things like them before. Rhoda let her enjoy the view awhile, and then they went into the kitchen, where Jotham and Jimmy were cracking butternuts and shellbarks for the next day. Rhoda and Susy rubbed up the Baldwin, Peck's Pleasant, and Seek-no-further apples until you could almost see your face in them. Rhoda felt too much responsibility to enjoy Thanksgiving as she had the quilting-party; but everything was so nice, and received so much praise, that she was very happy and satisfied.

But Jimmy never forgot the day and dinner; he always remembered how he sat perched beside Aunt Debby, with his favorite cat beside him, watching with anxious face, and one paw lifted and curled under, while she purred loudly for the morsels he now and then threw her; having his particular dainties pressed upon him; and how, after being filled with the good things, he lay down on the thickest tufted rug before the open fire in the parlor at Aunt Debby's feet; and how kitty came and lay there too, the warmth of the fire, the sound of the voices, and the purr of the cat — all mingled together in a pleasant way, that aftertimes never effaced from little Jimmy's mind.



THANKSGIVING EVENING. Page 114.



Mr. Easton and Jotham had said the air felt like snow all day ; it was cloudy, and towards night a stray flake began to flutter down now and then ; so the Eastons left before dark, and the festivities of the day were past things. Susy had stared and eaten until her poor wits were more scattered than ever ; but she declared she had never had such a good time in her life. Rhoda hurried her off to bed, and after seeing Jimmy safe in dream-land, she sat down to talk a little while with Aunt Debby.

"I think our dinner was as nice to-day as the Eastons' was last year — don't you?" said Rhoda, with a housewife's pride.

"Yes," said Aunt Debby, 'absently.

"I hope you are not very tired."

"O, no, not tired at all ; but I seem to-night to be thinking a great deal of the past. I don't seem to have much to do with what's to come in this world ; but just now I was thinking about that poor Susy. I suppose she never did enjoy herself much. I rather think she'd better stay here, through the winter at least ; it will make it easier for you to go to school ; and she can wait on Jimmy and me while you're away ;" and so that matter was settled.

When Rhoda went up-stairs, she stood at the window and looked out. There was not much to be seen ; the snow was falling so thickly, that she

could see but a few rods. She had a vague feeling, as though the day had been a finishing up, — of what she did not know, — and that she was to walk out, away from this into some new, unexplored region.



GOING TO SCHOOL. Page 117.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WARRENS.

SCHOOL commenced again in the clear, cold, December days, and Rhoda's premonitions of change did not amount to much, she thought, when gliding along to school with Jotham, in the old-fashioned, high-backed sleigh. Jimmy had to ride too; for snow, sleighing, and coasting were to him what they are to all boys. As they rode along, she said, —

"Do you know, I had a very queer feeling come over me as I was watching the snow Thanksgiving night?"

"What was it?"

"I don't know as I can express it in words; but I somehow felt as though all things that I knew about were finished; not that I was going to die, but that I could n't see any farther—just as I could n't see the gate when the snow fell so thick."

"Well, you see, you'd had so much to do with getting up that dinner, that I don't wonder a young girl like you should feel there was nothing

more to do when it was over. Mrs. Easton and Martha said it was a first-rate one ; and how glad they were Aunt Debby had you to live with her ! ”

He carried her all the way now on account of the snow. As they passed Dr. Winter's, Mrs. Winter tapped on the window for them to stop, coming to the door to tell them that Dr. and Mrs. Fields had returned, and hoped, when settled in their home, to find time to come to Northfield and see their friends. This was agreeable news to Jotham and Rhoda, who talked of it the rest of the way. It was a pleasant term of school to Rhoda ; for, knowing Susy Blake to be with Aunt Debby, she felt less anxiety, and could stay oftener with the Winters over night. Susy was getting to feel at home ; and found everything so delightful, that Aunt Debby could not but feel kindly towards her.

Christmas and New Year's soon came and went without much to mark them at Southfield. Rhoda knit, under Mrs. Winter's direction, a soft, drab wool, breakfast shawl for Aunt Debby, Mrs. Winter giving her wool for two, if she would knit one of them for her to present to an old lady friend of hers. Aunt Debby was much pleased with her shawl ; but instead of putting it on, as Rhoda hoped, it was carefully wrapped in a towel, and placed in the highest drawer of her tallest chest. Jimmy's stocking was hung up, and gladdened his heart by its distended and unshapely appearance.

Little frosted cakes, and a fine leather-covered ball made by Aunt Debby, red mittens knit by Rhoda, a toy sled whittled out by John Speers, a great package of molasses candy sent by his wife, and five, bright, new cents slipped in by Jotham, came pouring out of the little gray cornucopia. About the same time Aunt Debby wrote a letter, which was an unusual thing, — and just before New Year's received an answer and also a little packet; and on New Year's morning she gave to Rhoda two savings-bank books — one marked as the bank account of "Rhoda Thornton," and the other "James Warren Thornton," each testifying that the said Rhoda and James had the sum of one hundred dollars in said savings bank. She explained it to Rhoda: —

"I hope you may not have to touch this until you are a woman, when it will be more than now; but I wanted you should have something to remember me by if I should die."

"But I may always stay with you — may I not — as long as you live?"

"O, yes; but I am an old woman now."

"I don't want to think of ever leaving you or here," said Rhoda.

"I want you to always have a home here as long as you wish, and I shall try and leave it so."

"I shall remember you, Aunt Debby, if I live longer than you do, without money," said Rhoda with a sigh.

Aunt Debby was not commonly demonstrative ; but she drew the little girl she had saved from the almshouse to her, and kissed her, saying, —

" You 've been a help and comfort to me, child ; I want you should always remember it."

Rhoda's last term was drawing to a close, and she was studying hard to finish some of her books before she left. She often wished she could fit herself for a teacher, but put the wish aside when she thought of Aunt Debby. It might be, after Martha came ; but until then her place was on the farm.

One day, in the latter part of February, she went into Dr. Winter's at noon. Mrs. Winter looked quizzical.

" Whom do you think Aunt Debby has spending the day with her?"

" I am sure I don't know. She did n't expect any one."

" Some one is there, nevertheless."

" It can't be Miss Miles !" said Rhoda, suddenly.

" No," said Mrs. Winter ; " but a pretty near relative of hers."

" Who can it be ? Do tell me, Mrs. Winter."

" It's Mrs. Fields."

" Did I say Miss Miles ? O, why did n't she wait until night, and go with me ?" said Rhoda, disappointedly. " She'll be coming away when I get home."

" No ; she is to stay all night, The doctor

carried her over, and she is to come back when Jotham brings you over to-morrow; her husband is to come in a day or two, and go home with her."

"I am just as glad as I can be! I am afraid my lessons will suffer to-day. I wish school was over now"; and she skipped back to school. To have walked would have been almost impossible for her.

But we will go back to Aunt Debby's; for Mrs. Fields had an object in going while Rhoda was away. She had a long and interesting story to tell and consult about, unheard by Rhoda. It was very unlike the busy old lady Miss Miles knew two or three years before, to be found in an arm-chair in the sitting-room, leaving her beloved kitchen and housework to such an inefficient as poor Susy was in most respects; but her hands grew feeble, and the cares of this life were losing their hold. After her delight at seeing her visitors had passed over a little, Mrs. Fields noticed the change; she had grown weak and feeble, and looked older; but there was a softened, calm look on her face, that her busy youth and middle age had lacked.

"How glad Rhoda will be to see you! If she hears you are here, she can hardly wait until school's done."

"Yes; and I want to see her, and Jimmy too; he is also in school, I suppose. Still, I came over this morning when I knew she was away, on pur-

pose ; for I have something of great importance, it may be to the children, to tell you."

Aunt Debby gave a few final directions to Susy, and sat down again.

"There, now, we will be all to ourselves for a while, and I can hear your story."

"Well," began Mrs. Fields, "we came home last November, you know (and such a pleasant time as I had beyond the ocean ! I should like to tell you all about it, but I can't stop now ; when Rhoda comes, we'll have that). We sent word before we came to have a house belonging to my husband fitted for us ; and we found it almost ready, but not quite. The other part of the block is occupied by Mrs. Walter Warren ! you remember her husband's being buried here."

"Yes ; his funeral was the day Rhoda and Jimmy came here," said Aunt Debby.

"Mr. Warren was a friend of my father, and always a kind friend to me ; so she invited us, and insisted that we should stay a week or two with her, until our house was ready ; she and her nephew are all there are in the family, except servants. I know she meant it when she told how much pleasure it would give her, and we went. While there I became, for the first time, acquainted with her sister-in-law, Miss Esther Warren. She is the last of the Warrens, and she has inherited here, there, and everywhere from the family, until she is enormously rich. Even Walter War-

ren left all the real estate up here in Northfield to her, trying to the last to keep it in the family, although he left his wife and her nephew wealthy."

"I remember Esther Warren when she was young; she was plain-looking, and had the name of being very proud."

"She is that now; but when she tries to make herself agreeable, she is very much of a lady. She seemed to take rather a fancy to my husband and myself, and at Christmas we had an invitation to dine with her, in company with Mrs. Warren and Walter. I have never seen in this country, and hardly abroad, such an elegantly appointed house—everything costly and abundant, but in perfect taste. We were to dine at five."

"Dine at five!" said Aunt Debby. "What time was they going to have tea, I'd like to know? 't would be more'n bedtime, I should think."

"Yes; we had tea passed round at ten."

"I thought so," said Aunt Debby, quite roused to her old spirit. "What foolishness!"

"Well, the gas was lighted when we came down-stairs into the parlor, and Mrs. Warren and I walked to the fire in the grate, where my husband and Walter stood talking. Miss Esther came down-stairs with us, but stopped to say something to Burns (the man who has lived in her employ for years). As I came up to the fire, I looked up at a life-size portrait that was looking down at me

from over the mantel, and I almost stopped in astonishment.

"'Why,' said I, turning to my husband, 'Rhoda Thornton!'

"He looked at me as though he thought I had lost my mind. I rubbed my eyes before I looked again; but there was the wonderful resemblance. I saw it was an old picture, and of a young lady of eighteen or twenty years; but there was Rhoda's face, with its wavy auburn hair and clear blue eyes, with a glimmer of fire in them; and more than all, that little droop at the corners of the mouth that Rhoda has when a little troubled or tired. I could say nothing; but the doctor spoke, —

"'Well, Mary, you seem to find some acquaintance in that portrait.'

"'Who is it?' said I, turning to Mrs. Warren.

"'It is a portrait of Miss Sylvia Warren, an aunt of my husband's. She died more than sixty years ago, when she was eighteen years old. Neither my husband nor Esther ever saw her; so the picture is very old. She was the flower and darling of the family, and her death seemed a blow that was never forgotten by any of them. There have been several Sylvias in the family since, but none lived so long. My little daughter was named Sylvia.'

"She said this so sadly, that I pitied her from my heart. But I could not keep my eyes from the portrait, and I said there was a wonderful

accidental likeness in it to a pupil of mine — the most striking thing I ever saw.

"‘I saw just such a one once,’ said Walter Waring; ‘I saw a little girl that I was so struck with, for looking like some one I knew. that I almost lost my wits, and after bothering my head two or three days, I came home and went into my uncle’s parlor, and there hung the little girl’s face on the wall. You see, it was this picture she reminded me of.’

"‘Where did you see her?’ asked I, rather astonished at two such resemblances to the same picture.

"‘It was when I was at Northfield, to make arrangements for my uncle’s funeral. I was at a Mr. Easton’s and four or five poor little things from some almshouse near had lost their way, and came up to inquire. She seemed the only one of the bunch who knew anything, and she sat there like a little grandmother, with her brother in her lap.’

"‘Why,’ exclaimed I, ‘it is the same child you mean that I do. A Miss Nichols took those two little things just after that time. I boarded there, and the girl used to attend my school. Her name is Rhoda Thornton, and her mother’s name was Warren.’

"Mrs. Warren seemed much struck by the fact of our both remarking such a strong likeness.

"‘I should think you and Walter would trace

out those children; but do not mention it before Esther now,' said she.

"Just then Miss Warren came in, and dinner was announced. The subject was dropped; but I thought more and more of it through the evening, for I remembered Rhoda's telling me her mother's name was not only 'Warren,' but '*Sylvia* Warren'. The next day Walter came in.

"'I have been thinking about that little girl to-day, and I went into my aunt's library, to look in my uncle's Bible, that holds the family records and other genealogical papers. Then I thought I would bring them in here, and you and I would look them over together. The Bible goes back to my uncle's grandfather, Sylvester Warren, but the other papers go back two or three generations farther.'

"'But,' said I, 'we don't care for any farther back. That would make any relationship too distant to amount to anything. If we could trace a descent from Sylvester Warren for the little Thorntons, as I have a feeling we may, it would be a comparatively near relationship. And in an old family, so near extinct as the Warrens are, I think Miss Esther would be glad to hear of it.'

"'I don't know,' said he; 'Miss Esther would be so shocked at the fact that any relatives of hers had been in an almshouse, that she would think the stain could never be effaced, I am afraid.'

"'Well, let us look, and see,' said I. We found

that Sylvester Warren had three sons and one daughter — William, Joseph, James, and Sylvia; the dates of their births were all there, and the deaths of William, James, and Sylvia. William died unmarried, aged twenty-five; James, the father of Walter and Esther, died many years after, aged nearly seventy; the beloved Sylvia died, as we have heard, at the age of eighteen; Joseph's death was untold. Then we turned to the marriages: they were few. James married Esther Morton, and his son Walter, Mary Waring; their only child, Sylvia, was among the births, and then the deaths claimed the little one only a few months later. Of course this was all plain except Joseph Warren's marriage and death; so we called in Mrs. Warren, to find what she could tell in regard to her husband's uncle Joseph. She knew he married very unsatisfactorily to his father, who disowned him and died unreconciled; but she added that her husband had always talked of tracing out his Uncle Joseph's family. His grandfather died soon after making the will, giving his son Joseph only a few hundreds of his many thousands. His eldest son, William, had bitterly disappointed his father, and was killed, falling from his horse when intoxicated; and Walter thought, had his grandfather lived, he would have altered his will, making a better provision for his oldest, living son. James, the father of Walter, had shared in the family displeasure at his brother's marriage, but had felt so

assured that his father's sudden death prevented his making another will, that when he sent word to the distant State (where Joseph moved immediately after his marriage) of the death of their father and the substance of his will, he informed him that he intended doing more for him. But Joseph was a true Warren in some respects, and he wrote back that he was eldest son after William, and as such should have inherited the Northfield estate, and he would take nothing as a gift from his younger brother that should have been his by right. This reply of course offended James, and the brothers never met, wrote, or had any intercourse again.

"This seemed running plump against a wall in our investigations ; for we had no means of knowing whom he married, where his wife came from, or where they lived. We might ask Miss Esther ; but Mrs. Warren was almost sure she could tell nothing more ; for all happened before her birth, and it would also be a disagreeable subject to her, especially should she know we were trying to prove relationship between her and two little almshouse children. But Walter, who is studying for a lawyer, said it would be good practice to try and trace the case out. One day he came in, saying, —

" ' I wish I could get up some excuse to go up to the old house at Northfield. You know old Moses and Sally Miller, that take care of the place ? ' "

"I said I had never heard of Moses and Sally before ; but what of them ?

“‘Why, they are very old people, — older than Uncle Walter, considerably, — and they might give some clew to follow.’

“The idea struck me favorably, and we talked over plans for his going; but we began to think something was helping us, when the next day Miss Esther was wishing for some one to go to Northfield for her. She had received a letter from old Moses, and he was quite shut up with rheumatism, and was wishing for some arrangement to be made for his son’s family to move over from a neighboring farm. Miss Esther wanted some trusty person to see the son before she decided. It was rather a small business to put into the hands of her dignified lawyer, Mr. Gray, and Burns was not well just then; so she would not send him on such a winter excursion. Walter felt almost hypocritical when he offered to go, and she accepted so gratefully, and with so many fears of inconvenience to him. Soon after New Year’s he went; Miss Esther told him to get there in the morning, in order that a room might be prepared for him. He found Moses a prisoner by the kitchen fire, but Sally was bright and active; and, with the young granddaughter who lived with them, soon had a chicken broiling, and a roaring fire in the chamber always kept in order for any of the family who might come. After dinner he went to see the son; and liking his looks, made an agreement with him to take charge of the place for a year.”

"I heard Sam Miller and his wife had moved in with Moses and Sally," said Aunt Debby.

"By the time this matter was settled, it was dark, and he went back to supper; then, while the little girl and Sally were clearing away, he sat down to chat with Moses.

"'It seems a pity to see such a place as this standing empty and desolate — does n't it?' began Walter.

"'It do so, it do so,' said Moses, going on to tell that Miss Esther had never been there since Mr. Walter's funeral, and that she seemed to dislike it.

"'Why don't they sell it?'

"'O, a Warren will never do that; after she's dead, I suppose it will go; but nobody knows how she'll leave her money,' said Moses.

"'Do you remember Miss Esther and Uncle Walter's father?'

"'O, yes; I was fifteen years older than Mr. Walter. I shall be eighty-two next August, the fourteenth day. Why, I remember the old colonel's funeral; he was always called colonel; he died very suddenly, before Walter was born; he had three sons; James, Walter's father, was the youngest; but I remember them all. The old man never held up his head so high after William was killed; you see he had quarrelled with Joseph a few months before; and then, William was oldest, and looked like Sylvia; she was the darling of her father.'

“‘Whom did Joseph marry?’ asked Walter.

“‘I don’t remember her name; I am getting to forget names,’ said Moses; ‘but Sally will most likely remember. Women keep run of such things, you know.’

“Just then she came in; and from her Walter gained considerable information to start upon. Joseph’s wife was a Rhoda Hargrave, — Walter said he started when her first name was told, — the daughter of the farmer who managed the Northfield farm, one of the prettiest and best girls in town, Sally’s mother used to say. The Warrens had planned a match for him, and it was a bitter disappointment when they found he had formed an attachment which they considered so far beneath him. But in some things he was a true Warren, and opposition only made him more determined; and when Mr. Hargrave was turned away from the farm, on suspicion of favoring the affair, he persuaded Rhoda to consent to an immediate marriage; and they went to a distant State with her parents. He had a few thousands left from his mother’s property; for his mother had been dead some years. But in regard to his death, or what family he left, old Sally knew nothing; neither could she tell the place to which they moved. She remembered hearing that they returned to the place where they had lived before they came to Northfield; she believed old Mr. Battey over in Southfield was some connection or

relative of theirs ; for he and his father before him had always quarrelled with the Warrens, and she had heard it was because they were relatives of the Hargraves.

"The next morning Walter decided to ride round the country a while, and he soon found Mr. Battey's. Here he went in, and boldly inquired if they knew anything of the Hargrave family, who left the Warren place many years ago."

"I rather think if Betsey Battey was at home, he set a stream of words running," said Aunt Debby, "whether she had anything to tell or not."

"He said he heard the greatest talker he ever heard in his life. But there was little she could tell ; the amount of her communication was, that she had heard of the Hargraves, although too young when they left the Warren farm to remember them. They were relatives of her husband's mother. Rhoda, who married Joseph Warren, was their only child. They moved out to Otsego County, New York State. She believed her mother-in-law had heard from them a few times after they went out there ; but the old lady had been dead now these twenty years.

"So Otsego County, New York State, was the only point gained then, as 'Rhoda Hargrave' was the only clew Moses and Sally could give ; and Walter came home. Otsego County is much nearer now, thanks to cars, than when the Hargraves moved back and forth fifty years ago. So

one day, Walter, for a little jaunt, went up there. He knew it was a large county ; but he hoped the county town, Otsego, would give him some trace. He began, on his arrival, to inquire as to whether there were any Hargraves in the town. There was not one ; but there was a farm called the Hargrave farm about five miles off. He soon found the Hargrave farm, a good farm, with a comfortable farmhouse upon it, owned, however, by an elderly man named Jones, who had owned it about fifteen years. It looked discouraging ; but he had come to find out what he could. So he began his inquiries. The place had once been the property of a Hargrave family ; but Mr. Jones bought it from a Mr. Brown, who had never lived upon it, but owned it by foreclosing a mortgage. Mr. Jones knew nothing of the farm years before, having come there from another part of the State ; but he had heard that Mr. Brown had it from a man named Warren. Another clew. So, after finding where the oldest neighbors lived, and where deeds and mortgages were recorded, he thanked them, and took his leave.

“Upon examination of deeds, it was found that Mr. Brown held the mortgage as security for money lent one William Warren ; and Walter traced the farm back until convinced it was the same to which Mr. Hargrave and his son-in-law removed on leaving Northfield. Then to the old people whom he found living in a

little old house about a quarter of a mile from Mr. Jones ; and there he picked up all the missing links that make a complete chain from Colonel Sylvester Warren to poor little Rhoda and Jimmy Thornton. The old people knew all about it. James Warren and his wife Rhoda, died in less than six years after they came to Otsego County ; a malignant fall fever proved fatal to both of them, and to their youngest child, a baby. The old man remembered the triple funeral, when he was a boy. They left a son, William, about three years old, who was the care and hope of his grandparents, and a fine, handsome boy. He had a great desire to claim his far-off relatives, of whom his grandmother had told him ; but both grandparents discouraged him, thinking he would only be repulsed. He finally married a fine young woman, whose family came from Stonefield, a neighboring town to the Northfield he so longed to see. He had expensive tastes and small business talents ; and after the death of his fond grandparents, the property they had saved for him soon began to waste away. His only child was a daughter, whom he named for the beautiful aunt Sylvia, of whom his grandmother so often spoke ; for Mrs. Hargrave had loved the fair girl taken away before so much trouble and family dissension had fallen on her father's house. When the last Sylvia was sixteen or seventeen years old, a distant relative of her mother came

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from Stonefield to enter business in Otsego, — one Silas Thornton, — and the young man and his fair cousin soon became attached to each other. Just after their marriage, which took place when Sylvia was about nineteen, her father died, and the heavily mortgaged farm was obliged to go; so they moved away into another town, where Mrs. Warren soon after died. Then the California gold fever came on, and the young husband concluded to try his luck — which had been rather hard in the States — in the new land. He left his wife well provided for, for a long time, trusting to send her more soon; but they never heard from him; and sick with anxiety and care, the poor young mother died, leaving her little ones to be forwarded to Stonefield poor-farm. There, Aunt Debby, we have brought it to you in this shape. You see it is a plain line from Sylvester Warren to Rhoda and Jimmy; they are legal heirs to all the Warren property; but the children are more yours than any other person's, and I want you to tell us how to move next — whether to go to Miss Esther or not."

Aunt Debby thought a while.

"They are very dear to me. I cannot bear to lose them; but my time on earth grows short. I should like to know they had friends after me. But we will talk to-morrow; I am so astonished now, I can hardly tell what is best to do."

CHAPTER VIII.

PLANS.

AT night Rhoda arrived from school. Mrs. Fields was gratified to find her so much grown and improved. Jimmy was the same quaint, pleasant-tempered little fellow that he ever was. Rhoda, with the Warren features, inherited the Warren self-reliance and spirit, while Jimmy seemed to go back to the beauty and amiability of the Hargraves. He had just now come to the age of having his teeth look like a dilapidated fence irregularly boarded, with now and then a gap; but he had brown eyes, and a broad, white forehead, and was in all respects a bright, lovable, little boy. Mrs. Fields, you see, was looking at them critically now, thinking how they would appear to the tall, stately, high-spirited Miss Esther Warren; she wished she could see her way clear as to the next step; but Aunt Debby was evidently pondering the matter, and her opinions were, generally, worthy of notice. So she concluded to throw off the perplexity for the night. She and Aunt Debby had agreed in thinking it best not to

unsettle Rhoda's mind until something definite came of it.

The evening passed delightfully to Rhoda, listening to her beloved teacher's stories of the journeying in far-away lands, that seemed so marvellous and distant, that her imagination became almost lost at thoughts of them, as older people's become among the stars when the mighty distances and vast dimensions are considered. Rhoda, in spite of her disadvantages, had picked up a great deal of information by reading. Rollin's Ancient History and Plutarch's Lives were among Aunt Debby's books, and she had travelled over them with more interest than many a girl of her age feels in the most interesting child's book. She had been allowed free access to Dr. Winter's library, and had formed, through that, a good acquaintance with the English classics. Aunt Debby went to bed early; so they sat down by the fire, Rhoda with her arm in her friend's lap, for a little longer talk.

"Well, dear, it is now nearly three years — is it not? — since we saw each other. You are now fourteen — are you not?"

"Yes, ma'am; I shall be fifteen the second of next November. Jimmy will be seven in the spring."

"Do you ever make any plans for the future?" said Mrs. Fields.

"Yes; I cannot help thinking about it very often.

I know what I should like, and what I shall have to do. My greatest plan is to be able to fit myself for a teacher, and then send Jimmy to college, and by and by he and I live together, and have books and handsome pictures and things, just as I should like; but as long as Aunt Debby lives and wants me, I shall stay here and help her just as I do now; but, you know, Jotham is going to marry Martha Easton some time, and after that there may be some way for me."

"You like Martha — do you not?"

"O, yes; she has always been very good to me ever since I first saw her — that night we got lost, so long ago. How frightened I felt, and how glad I was when I heard voices, and saw the black horse!"

"What black horse?"

"One that a young man rode that came to see Mr. Easton about a funeral over at Northfield."

"How came you to be named Rhoda?" said Mrs. Fields.

"Mother used to say I was named for my great-grandmother. I wish they had n't named me such an old-fashioned name."

"I think it a very good name."

"I wish I had been named Alice or Caroline or Amelia," said Rhoda.

"When you get to be older, you will like your name just as well as those," said her friend.

"They can't nickname my name. We have

Carrie and Mollie and Nettie at school; but I am plain Rhoda all the time."

Mrs. Fields laughed.

"Well, just keep on being plain Rhoda; that's a good thing to be. Well, dear," continued she, "I think you have been a very good little girl since you came here; you have been helpful and kind, and have learned to control that little spark of temper you have had to contend with; and every bad thing you drive out of your heart leaves room for a good one. There's nothing for any of us to do but to look to the Lord for help in ordering our daily steps aright, taking every little step in the right direction on towards the heavenly state. You may—most likely will—leave here some time, and it may be that an entirely different life may open before you; if it should, I feel quite sure you will try to live as unselfishly as you do here. Remember, dear, love to the Lord and love to the neighbor are the two great commandments. But, I suppose, we must go to bed; for you have to be up early, Aunt Debby tells me."

Rhoda pondered a little as to what change might come to her, and went to sleep in the midst of her meditation. In the morning she was up bright and cheerful as the sun; she wished to do honor to their guests by getting such a breakfast as would show the capability of the house, and her own good will. So she and Susy, after insisting that Aunt Debby should stay in bed until she gave

her word to rise, went to work. She made all the bread now, and after putting her dainty biscuits into the stove-oven, she began her other preparations, Susy, assisting or hindering, as the case might be. There had been two plump cockerels less to crow this morning, owing to Jotham's and Susy's hands the night before. The dainty things were lying split on the gridiron. Susy ground the coffee, and then, under Rhoda's direction, beat eggs for an omelet. Then a pan of Brindle's milk was skimmed; her milk gave thicker cream than any of the other cows'. She was an Alderney, one of Jotham's purchases. Aunt Debby had poohed at her at first, but soon admired her, as she did most of Jotham's innovations. Everything was started except the buckwheat cakes; they must be fried as they were eaten. Then she called Aunt Debby and Mrs. Fields; and while waiting for them, she got a pitcher of maple syrup and golden squares of butter; but she was repaid when their visitor said she never tasted a more perfect and delicious breakfast. Susy could fry buckwheats; and she brought the light, delicate, brown cakes hot from the griddle as a topping-off of all.

Rhoda had to be busy ordering Susy's work for the day, and getting ready for school; and Mrs. Fields and Aunt Debby went into the sitting-room for a final talk.

"I've been thinking," began Aunt Debby,

"nearly all night about what was best to do for the children. For a while I kept my mind on plans to keep them with me, and get Esther Warren to do something for them in her will, maybe; but I soon found I was selfish in that; I was shutting her off from the comfort I was dreading to lose. She might not look upon it as a blessing at first, but I see it could hardly fail of being good for her to have some young relatives of her own to take her cares and thoughts from herself. Then it seemed to come to me, in the dead of the night, as it was, that I am almost done here."

"I hope not, Aunt Debby," began Mrs. Fields.

"Don't say that," said Aunt Debby, cheerfully. "It looks very different to me from what it does to you, to think of going out of the body. Only think, I've worn this body more than seventy years; and though I think much of it, yet I can remember when it was pleasanter to carry round; and if I have n't done all the good I might, my time has gone by for much more use in this world. So I trust when my call comes to be ready, that I can leave all my shortcomings to the mercy of the Lord. When I do go, Jotham will have what is here, and he is going to take just the wife I should have picked out for him if I had the say. Martha would be just as good to the children as she could be, I've no doubt; but they could not do for them as Miss Esther might. So it seemed to me, if she wanted them, she was the one for them to go to.

That settled, I began to try to find a good way to have it broke to her, so she 'd take to them favorably ; but underhanded ways and twistings were never my ways, and at last it came to me, what's the use of beating round the bush that way? Let some one go right to her, and tell her that there was a little girl who looked so much like Sylvia Warren's portrait as to make them interested to trace her, and it was found that she and her brother were great-grandchildren of her Uncle Joseph. They were found in Stonefield poor-house, and old Deborah Nichols took them from there, and had found a great deal of comfort in them ; for they are as good childreⁿ as any in the land, and she had meant to leave them a home at her place when she died, until they could do for themselves ; but it seemed right to let the only relative they had in the world know of their existence. After I thought all that over, I went to sleep, and slept well until daylight."

"I am glad you have so decided," said Mrs. Fields. "I shall see the lady immediately after my return, and tell her. She will doubtless think me meddlesome, and not thank me for troubling myself with her relatives ; but I shall have done what seems to me to be right, and then I shall leave it. But we will not say anything to Rhoda yet. Let her finish her school term, and go on just the same. I should like to tell Miss Warren that the children are ignorant of any relation-

ship. I shall just tell her the facts, and let it go."

"Let me hear from you soon, for I shall think about it all the time."

"O yes, certainly; I will keep you informed by letter, and may be come in the spring, if anything important should happen."

Mrs. Fields rode back with Jotham and Rhoda, who went into school, unconscious of the change hanging over her.

Southfield is rather a dull place in winter, especially in the disagreeable month of February; so we will leave it for a short visit to the city, and we will go to the finest and most aristocratic part of it, and into one of the most elegant of the old mansions there. It is morning, and Miss Esther's private sitting-room, whither we are going, is on the south side of the house, and has a deep bay window; for Miss Esther's house is on the corner, and has a little garden room between the house and street. What a beautiful room it is! Nothing new and glaring, but full of all comfortable and elegant things. The bright coal fire in the low, basket shaped grate vies with the spots of sunshine on the soft colors of the Wilton carpet in making the room run over with cheerfulness. At a little table in the pleasantest corner of the room sits Miss Esther herself, with a gorgeous piece of worsted work before her, and beside her a large standard basket, overflowing with brilliant German

wools. There is no one else in the room except Polly, and Polly deserves notice; she stands in the bright sunshine on a cross-bar that is fixed on a standard, about three feet from the floor, which standard is placed in the middle of a little sandy garden, with a low wire fence round it. Nothing grows in the garden; but some bits of apple and cracker are strewed round. Polly is dressed very gaudily in scarlet and green and gold; she feels very important, and struts round clumsily, once in a while letting herself down from her perch; she often turns her eye up at her mistress, as if inviting her attention; but Miss Esther is the only uncheerful thing in her sitting-room this winter morning. She has a slight cold, and cannot find just the shade she wants for her work. She wonders they could be so careless in putting up her colors. So Polly, after waiting a while, opens a conversation by remarking, in a guttural voice, —

“Good morning, Miss Warren,” who smiles a little, and answers, —

“Good morning, Polly.”

This delights Polly so much, that she see-saws on her perch so insanely that she tumbles off; but nothing daunted, she scrambles up again, and laughs a great horse-laugh, and finishes up with, —

“O, dear me, I shall kill myself!”

But she can see out of the window; and just now a carriage goes by. She chirrup to the horses, and makes a noise like the snap of a

whip, and as it goes out of sight, she screams, "Whoa!"

Then a great Newfoundland dog goes trotting by, and she whistles for him, and calls, "Here Bose! here, Bose!" until he seems to hear, and stops to look round and up inquiringly; then Polly shouts her laugh again, and again declares she shall kill herself.

"Come, come, Polly," says her mistress, "you are too noisy. I shall send you to the house-keeper's room if you don't stop."

Polly looks at her understandingly, and begins to talk low, saying, "Don't make so much noise, Polly — don't make so much noise," mocking her mistress, and hanging, head down, by one claw from her perch. Now the door-bell rings, and she comes up dignified and erect. "Walk in;" "How do you do?" and keeps up a series of such remarks, until the door opens, and a visitor comes in, when she subsides into perfect watchful silence; like most Pollys, not talking much before strangers. The room looks very pleasant to Mrs. Fields when she comes in; but she dreads the interview she has undertaken. Miss Warren is a very dignified lady, almost sixty years old, and the interest Mrs. Fields has taken, and the investigations she has been assisting in making, will, she fears, seem like officiousness; but, for the sake of the little Thorntons, she perseveres.

"How do you do, Mrs. Fields?" said Miss

Warren. "I am glad to see you; for I am shut in by a cold, and they have made mistakes in putting up my worsted at Furbisher's, and my sister-in-law is out of town. So I was feeling quite out of sorts as you came in; and I know you to be one of the cheerful kind."

"I believe I am generally cheerful in these latter days," said Mrs. Fields. "I find it so much easier to take what cannot be cured in a spirit of endurance, that I let things slip more easily than I used to; but I think a cold a good excuse for being out of sorts."

"When one is alone as much as I am," said Miss Esther, "trifles will make one feel blue and vexed when there is no one to mention them to. Speaking of my disappointment at the mistake in my colors makes it look of much less importance than it did half an hour ago, when I sat here alone, except Polly, who kept up such a racket I could hardly think."

"Poor Polly!" remarked the parrot.

"Why, Polly," said the visitor, "I wish you would talk with me."

But Polly only glowered at her, and said, "Shut up!" and then got down and walked round her yard.

"Yes, I am very much alone. My sister often tells me I should have some intelligent young person as a companion; but I have rather dreaded it, and never undertaken to find one."

Here was an opening for Mrs. Fields's mission, and she cast about for the best way of entering upon the subject. She told her husband afterwards that never before was she so at a loss for words; but at length she began abruptly, —

"I came this morning on an errand or something, — I don't know what to call it, — and I expect you will think me very officious and disagreeable; but I want you not to decide on the merits of the case until you have heard all, and then the whole matter will be in your hands for disposal. You know the circumstances of my father's death, and of my teaching for two years after. The last year I taught at Southfield. I went there to be away from the city, and near my friend Mrs. Winter, at Northfield Centre; but I boarded with a Miss Deborah Nichols."

"I remember her," said Miss Warren — "a woman of very good qualities."

"Yes, she is. She had with her two little children, whom she had taken from Stonefield poorhouse a few months before I went there. Nothing was known of their parentage, except that their father was proved to have come from Stonefield, and they were sent from a town in New York. They were two of the best children I ever met with, and unusually intelligent and teachable. The little girl was nearly eleven, and the boy between three and four. They attended my school, and I became very much attached to them, especially the

girl. She told me all she could of her parents. Her father was named Silas Thornton, and her mother, before marriage, was Sylvia Warren." Miss Esther gave a little start at this, but looking intently at Mrs. Fields, said nothing. "The children are named Rhoda and James Warren Thornton. I always remembered them affectionally, but after my marriage only heard from them through Mrs. Winter, who became equally interested in them. Last Christmas, you know, we dined here. When we came into the parlor, you staid to speak to Burns, and I walked to the fire; but looking up at your aunt's portrait, I was as if thunderstruck. I seemed to see little Rhoda Thornton looking at me from the frame. On speaking of the resemblance, Walter Waring spoke of his seeing a child also resembling the same picture. The coincidence was so striking, when I found that it was Rhoda, that he also had seen accidentally at Northfield, that it made a great impression on my mind, as I found afterwards it had on his; and we began to try to trace the family of the little Thorntons."

Mrs. Fields went into the same details that she had told Aunt Debby. When she had finished, Miss Esther began, —

"I should have liked Mrs. Fields, to have been informed of this investigation, if you were intending to find them relatives of mine."

"I am not quite through yet. I told you it would look officious; but when you consider how

slight a thing we started upon, — an accidental likeness, it might be, of a little girl to a picture more than sixty years old, — to say anything about it, and disturb you with it, would, we thought, be foolish, and more disagreeable than now. I also felt that Miss Deborah Nichols should be informed first of all; for she has been a mother to the little motherless things ”

“ I suppose she will be glad enough to get rid of them now,” said Miss Esther, rather bitterly.

“ Instead of that,” said Mrs. Fields, “ when I laid the matter before her, she took the night to consider it, and tried to think it best to say nothing about it, and leave the children with her; but thinking her time would be short, — for she is a feeble old woman now, — and that you might find the comfort in them that she had, she concluded it was a selfish view for her to take. She told me she had made arrangements for the children to have a home at her place until of age, or as long as they needed a home. Her heir is a young man whom she has brought up, and he is interested in the children; and finally, the children themselves know nothing of this. It is only known to Aunt Debby, Walter Waring, my husband, and myself. Your sister, even, having been absent since New Year’s, knows nothing about it. Now, I beg you will believe no curiosity or meddlesomeness was intended in our searching this out, but just take this matter into consideration. There is

no need of your doing anything about it unless you wish, there is no change in the children's condition, they are just where they were before; but if you should like to see them, or in any way feel interested in them, you can do so. I just leave it with you, and I will not trespass on your time longer."

She rose to go, but Miss Esther said, —

"Please sit down again. You have brought me a strange and unexpected matter to consider, and I must hear a little more before I decide upon it. I have wished for years that I had some relative that I could feel was coming after me to take what I shall leave. My brother Walter was always planning to find whether our Uncle Joseph left heirs; but I confess I then thought little of the matter, and disliking the manner in which my father was treated by his brother when he wrote after their father's death, I should have preferred relatives from any other branch, but now they are brought to my notice as really existing, I must consider it. They must be rough and uncultivated. To think of their having been in a poorhouse!"

"Far from being rough and uncultivated," said Mrs. Fields; "they are unusually gentle and refined. Their stay at Stonefield was only for a few months. Of course, in many little particulars they show an ignorance of the customs and usages of polite society; but in the essen-

tials of good breeding they excel many whose opportunities have been greater. Rhoda is now fourteen, tall of her age, and in features, complexion, and expression still remarkably like your aunt's portrait. She has acquired much information by reading, and you would find her education compare favorably with girls of her own age in the city, in the solid branches. Of accomplishments, she is of course ignorant. Miss Debby, thinking she must sometime support herself, has endeavored to make a useful girl of her, and in all household education she is one of a hundred. Jimmy, as they call him, is a fine-looking little fellow, very affectionate and lovable; he will win his way among all kinds of people. But I will go now. If you want any more information that I can give, send me word, and I will come in."

"I wish you would. I hope you will not think me hard that I cannot at once express satisfaction at hearing that a lonely woman, like myself, can claim relationship with these young lives; but at my age it is hard to be reconciled to change, in manner of thought, even. Should I never see them, they are my legal heirs, I suppose, and I must reconsider the arrangements I have made for my property and affairs after me; but, Mrs. Fields, I do not feel angry with you, and I shall try and do what is right. Good-by. Come in to-morrow -- will you not?"

Mrs. Fields told the doctor at dinner that she had never esteemed Miss Esther so highly as she did now, seeing her desire to do justly and rightly, in spite of her dread of the little almshouse heirs so unexpectedly presented to her notice.

After a while Walter Waring came to know how the news was received. He had known Miss Warren for years before Mrs. Fields ever saw her, and his opinion was, that she was becoming interested, and that it would do her good to have the little waifs to think about.

"But," said he, "Aunt Mary came home to-day, and has gone over for the evening. I thought it best for Miss Esther to tell her first; so I said not a word. She is just the one to talk about it. If Miss Esther should not want them, she will propose to take them herself, I'll warrant."

The next day Burns came with Miss Warren's compliments, and a request that Mrs. Fields would come over in the carriage with Mrs. Warren. She began to tell her friend how disagreeable the duty of telling had been.

"Never regret that you did it," said Mrs. Warren. "I think it has been of benefit to Esther already; and I think, moreover, that both those little things will be there in less than three months. What a delight it will be to me as well as to her! I so love young people and children!" The dear lady's eyes filled with tears, and Mrs. Fields knew



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that tiny Sylvia, so long with the angels, was in her mother's thoughts.

It was a cloudy, drizzly morning, and the cheerful sitting-room had lost some of its light and glow, but its mistress had gained from some source a new light; it was not exactly pleasure, but it was interest and thought for something outside of the narrow little bounds her peculiar situation had drawn around her. Her first question was, —

"How can I see these children most conveniently and quickly? It will be a terrible thing for me to break up my habits of life, as I should have to, to introduce two children into my quiet home; but I suppose they are the nearest relatives I have in the world; for the few on my mother's side are very far removed, so that I have no particular interest in them. But I must see these children before I can think of taking them myself, and before they know of any relationship; then I can decide whether to educate them at boarding-schools or to bring them here."

"I have been thinking how we could manage it," said Mrs. Warren, "but cannot quite see. If we should send for them to come to Mrs. Fields's, our interest would seem peculiar to such a bright girl as I hear Rhoda to be."

"I thought of that at first," said Mrs. Fields; "but there are one or two objections. One was, Miss Debby has always seen that they are comfortably clothed, but her old-fashioned ideas would

not harmonize with city fashions; and although Rhoda has taste, and gives a little air of refinement to her prints and gingham, I know they would not be ready for a visit at short notice. But I have a plan that I hope you will like. Why cannot you go with me to Dr. Winter's, and I will send word to Aunt Debby, and we will ride over there for the day? Rhoda will think nothing of your coming, except that you are friends of mine, and you will see both under the best circumstances, perfectly free and unembarrassed at home, and it will gratify Aunt Debby so much!"

Miss Warren raised some slight objections; but Mrs. Fields smoothed them away, and it was decided she should write to Mrs. Winter, and also Aunt Debby, appointing the last of the next week, if convenient, for the visit.

"Why, Mary Fields!" exclaimed Mrs. Warren, as they went away. "Do you realize what a miracle is going on under our very eyes? One week ago, if any one had told me Esther Warren would leave her home in the month of March, and willingly go to Northfield Centre, so near the old place so gloomy to her, among strange people, and to see two children who had been in an almshouse, with the intention of bringing them in to disturb the clock-work she and Burns keep running, I should have declared it impossible."

"I hope it will be all for the best, and I cannot feel but that it will," said her friend.

"But what a strange overturn it will be to the children should they ever come here!"

That night the letters were written, posted, and duly received; but "Man proposes and God disposes." The well-planned visit was not to be; there was an unseen presence shadowing the old house at Southfield. Aunt Debby felt it; but she knew it would not enclose them until her Lord's full time, and then it would be out of the shadow into full sunlight.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW HOME.

TWO or three days after the posting of the letters spoken of in the last chapter, there came one of the driving snow-storms that often visit New England in March. For a day and a night the wind howled and snow blew, falling thick and fast, drifting around corners and up alleys in the city, while it blocked roads and hid fences in the country. Travel by rail was interrupted, and things stood still for a day or so after the sun came out to see what the clouds and elements had been doing. Mrs. Fields therefore was not surprised that she did not receive answers to her letters immediately; but when the mails were once more regular, she was startled when she saw three instead of the two expected. She knew Mrs. Winter's writing, and Aunt Debby's formal, old-fashioned hand could not be mistaken; but the third was a stiff, school-boy hand, evidently written by one unused to directing letters. She opened that first, and we will give it entire; for it will tell its own story:—

SOUTHFIELD, March 6.

MRS. FIELDS.

Dear Madam: — I write to inform you of the sad event that has taken place in our family. My beloved aunt, Deborah Nichols, died last night. She had been as well as usual through the day, and had written the letter to you which I send with this. She talked with me in the evening, and told me to be sure and post it to-day; then she told me some things she wanted done on the farm this summer, and talked cheerful as common. When she went to her room, she said she thought that was all she wanted to speak about, and she would go to sleep. Rhoda has slept in her room on a cot bed lately, and she heard no noise through the night, and thought she was sleeping when she got up, and that she would not wake her; but she sent Susy Blake to tell her when breakfast was ready. Susy came back, looking scared, and said she could not wake her. I went in, and found her dead; she lay very easy and peaceful. Rhoda takes it very hard, and Jimmy also; we have sent him down to John Speers's. Mrs. Easton has come over. The funeral will be day after to-morrow. We should be very glad to have you come if you could.

Yours respectfully,

JOTHAM HARRIS.

Tears dimmed the eyes of Mrs. Fields as she read Jotham's homely letter. The funeral was already past, she found.

"Well," thought she, "why should I shed one tear for the dear, useful, old woman?"

She took up her letter almost reverently, folded in a quaint old way, and sealed with a wafer. Consistent to the last, her friend thought. We will give her letter also, as it was the last Aunt Debby ever wrote.

DEAR FRIEND MARY FIELDS : —

Your letter was duly received. It afforded me great satisfaction. I shall be glad if I can see you here next week, as you propose. I feel assured that Miss Esther Warren will, when she sees my children, be glad to think they may be hers. I am gratified to think that they will be under your care somewhat after they leave me. But my eyes do not allow me to write much, and my hand is very unsteady, as my writing shows. I passed my seventy-fifth birthday last week. I am not an extremely old woman; but I have broken down all at once during the last two years. I always liked to finish one thing before I began another, and I seem to have been more favored in seeing my business in this world finished before I am called away, than most. When I saw a way open for the children, I began to think about Susy Blake; but Mrs. Easton and Martha both promised, before I mentioned it, to keep her at one house of the other, and not send her back. Good-by. If I am here, I shall be glad to see you next week; if not, you will know I am in a better place, and among my own.

Yours affectionately,

DEBORAH NICHOLS.

Mrs. Fields's tears fell, that she should see her face no more; but she could not mourn for one who had thus finished her appointed work; and she could but wish that her own call might find her as ready. But this altered all their plans; so she and Mrs. Warren went with the letters to Miss Esther.

"Poor children!" said Mrs. Warren; "I almost wish that they knew they had relations and other friends; they must feel lonely and desolate."

"It would not make much difference to them just yet if they did," said Mrs. Fields; "but when the first force of the blow is spent, and Rhoda

begins to think what next to do, I wish she might know that she is not obliged to take the burden on her patient little shoulders. She has borne a great deal for so young a girl; she has been house-keeper and scholar for nearly a year now, working early and late, snatching half hours whenever she could for study; and now that the funeral is over, she will begin to plan what next she must do. I will go up, I believe."

"Just what I was about to propose," said Miss Esther, who had just finished the letters, and whose eyes showed that the simple story had touched her. "There is nothing to do but to bring them here just as they are, and I must decide afterwards as to where they are to be educated. I suppose schools here are better than anywhere else."

"Yes," said Mrs. Fields; "I have not much doubt but that you will keep them here; but, as you say, you can tell after seeing them. Now, if you wish, I will go up to-morrow and stay a day or two, and then bring them home with me for a while, maybe."

"No," said Miss Esther; "I want them to come here immediately. You and Mary may be here; but I want them to understand that this is their home. After they are settled, they may visit you both."

"Well, just as you say; but I must go home, so as to start this afternoon. Let us see; the

funeral was yesterday — Tuesday ; I will try and be back Saturday."

"The carriage shall be at the station Saturday afternoon," said Miss Warren.

"I think she means to send them right off to school," said Mrs. Warren, slyly, as they walked home.

"She acts very much like it," said Mrs. Fields, laughing.

Before she started in the afternoon, Burns came over with a note containing money to defray the children's expenses, and to provide what she could for their comfort in the short time she would have.

The house at Southfield seemed very lonely the day after its mistress's form passed over the threshold for the last time. The snow lay thick and white around it, though the spring sun was levelling it fast. Mrs. Easton went home the day of the funeral, and Rhoda and Susy were putting things in their accustomed order again. Although Aunt Debby had spoken so often of leaving them, Rhoda and Jimmy, like other children, could not realize that any change was coming ; and now that it had come, after the day's work was done, they sat down together in the sitting-room, to think and talk about it. Jimmy was a sensible little fellow, and his sister could talk to him with great satisfaction. Indeed, I think many sisters of fourteen, who feel quite above the intellect of their seven years old brothers, would be astonished to

find how sensible the sympathizing little boys can be when rightly treated. They had just come to the parlors, which Rhoda had swept, dusted, and again darkened.

"It made me feel kind of bad, sister," began Jimmy, "to shut up all Aunt Debby's folks' pictures in there, 'cause there's nobody now any 'lotion to them to care much for them — is there?" Jimmy cut some of his words rather short, now, though he was "'most eight," as he said.

"No," said Rhoda; "they are not very pretty pictures; but I hope they will be taken care of somewhere, for Aunt Debby's sake. I think Martha will hang them in some of the spare rooms when she comes."

"What is she coming for?" said Jimmy: he was not very observant of such affairs as Jotham and Martha's prospects.

"Why, she is going to be Jotham's wife, very soon, because he will need her, now Aunt Debby's gone."

"Can't we stay here, then?" asked Jimmy, rather alarmed. "I don't want to go away; I should n't want to leave the peacock, and I know he'd miss me; and John Speers and ma'am Speers, they think a great deal of me."

"Yes; we can stay here, I suppose; but I must be thinking of doing something for us. I must not depend on Jotham and Martha long."

"What will you do, sister?"

"I don't know ; I wish I could know enough to teach school when I am a little older. In two years I should be old enough, I rather think, or three, at any rate."

"Luly and Arthur Winter have got a father and mother — have n't they ? Don't you wish we had ?"

This was too much for Rhoda, whose tears began to come in spite of her efforts to command herself.

"O, Jimmy, I wish we had. It seems as though I have had to be old and taking care so long."

"May be our father is alive now, sister." Jimmy had heard so often from Rhoda of their father and mother, that he frequently spoke of both.

"No," said she ; "I know he is not ; he would have looked us up before now ; but I wish I could know all about it — why we never did hear."

It seemed a singular coincidence, but that night just at dusk, Rhoda, standing at the window, saw Jotham coming through the gate with a tall, rough-looking, elderly man, and on coming in, he called her aside.

"This is a man named Burdick. He used to live in Stonefield, but has been in California these past eight years ; he knew your father there, and was with him when he died, and has been looking for you ever since he came back, six months ago, to tell you about it. Do you feel as though you could see him ?" said he, noticing how pale she grew.

"Yes," answered she; "I have wished to know about my father too many years to lose any chance."

She went into the room. The story that she heard was a common one among the first gold hunters. Her father had been but a few months at the diggings, and was succeeding remarkably well, when a violent fever attacked him, and he lived only a fortnight.

"I give him what care I knew how, and he seemed to know me now and then. Yer see I knew his father, and thought a power of him; and, as I say, I did for Silas as long as life was in him. He used ter try and tell me just how to send word to his wife, but he never could quite tell so as I could get it straight. Wal, after he was gone, I wrote two or three letters, and sent 'em to where I understood your mother was, and one to Stonefield; but I suppose they war n't right; and the one I sent to Stonefield, I found since I come home, the man I sent to had moved away before that, and I hain't a relation here now. So I concluded to wait till I come home, and find you; but I've kept putting off coming from year to year till now. Your father had done pretty well, but his sickness and death took most what he had, but there was about a hundred dollars left, and I've kept it safe, and here it is; and here's a picter I found among his things; I've kept that all these six years, for it's now six years since he

died up at Higgins's Claim. I've inquired all round for you without coming on any trace; but yesterday, when I heard of Miss Debby's funeral, I thought I'd come over, for I used ter know her, and somebody told me who you were. And I was glad, for I felt as though I must see or hear of you afore I went back to the diggings; for I've got sort of unsettled for these parts, and none of my folks are here now, and I'm going back soon."

Rhoda took the little worn case. How well she remembered when the picture was taken, her mother holding Jimmy, a fat, staring baby, while she stood at her side, with long curls hanging on her shoulders. She could not see her mother's fair face for her tears. She and Jimmy stood alone. Father and mother gone so long ago, and now Aunt Debby. A sense of desolation swept over her. She could only remember what was expected of her, long enough to thank Mr. Burdick and add her invitation to Jotham's for him to stay to supper, but he could not. When he went, she again thanked him, while her tears fell.

"Never mind, never mind," said he. "If ever you want anything from me, let me know, and you shall have it, for your father's sake." He told Jotham the same, and gave his address to him.

Rhoda crept to bed early, and cried more bitterly than she had before; but at last a sense of her Heavenly Father's protection quieted her, and she slept. The next morning her eyes were so heavy,

and her whole look so listless, that Jotham was troubled.

"I hope, Rhoda," said he, "that you are not worrying about your affairs. I want you to know and feel that you and Jimmy have as good a right here as I have. Aunt Debby told me, the last night when she talked about things, that you two were to stay here as long as you wanted to, if no relation of yours claimed you. She had something on her mind, I think, that some one would, but she did not say so in words."

"I do not think we have a relation on the face of the earth," said Rhoda. "I like to stay with you and with Martha, when she comes; but it seems so sad to me to think how my father and mother both went so young and left us. But there! we have been helped and carried along, and something may come now, so we shan't have to stay until you get tired of us."

"I shan't ever do that."

"Well, you have been good to us ever since that first day you spoke to us, stringing beans at Mr. Harmon's," said Rhoda, cheered, and smiling a little.

"Now, keep on looking like that," said he. "Don't get in the dumps again."

The snow was melting fast, and consequently the roads were in a very bad condition. So Rhoda was surprised to hear sleigh-bells after dinner, and to see Dr. Winter turn into the gate; but when she

saw her beloved Mrs. Fields get out, and saw the doctor take out a valise, showing she was to stay for the night, she ran joyfully to meet her. Dr. Winter drove away, and she could only put her arms round her friend's neck, and sob out her satisfaction. Jimmy came in and hung on the skirts of her dress, trying for some of the attention, and to stop the sorrowful demonstrations; and even Susy came to the room door, and tried to look sober, but kept breaking into a pleased laugh; she was like a little child, and was glad of some diversion from the gloom of the house. After Mrs. Fields sat down by the fire, and laid aside her bonnet and cloak, Rhoda told her about Aunt Debby's death and funeral, and the visit she had from Mr. Burdick.

"I felt last night as though Jimmy and I were cut off from everything," said she. "I found I had always had a feeling that my father might come back, although I thought I believed him dead."

She went from the room, and came back with the precious picture. Mrs. Fields looked at it with moist eyes. The pretty young mother and her two darlings, carried by the proud young father to the far country, still looked brightly out at the world they had both left.

"Where is Jotham?" said Mrs. Fields. "I have a strange and long story to tell you; and as he is your guardian just now, he ought to hear it. I told

Aunt Debby when I was here before, and it gave her great pleasure ; and I think, Rhoda, you will feel, when you realize it, that the Lord has cared for you and Jimmy, and not left you friendless."

Jotham was called, and they heard the story we so well know.

"Now," concluded Mrs. Fields, "I do not say your troubles are over for this world ; that can never be while we are here ; but you will have a different life to lead, a new place to fit into. Your cousin, to whom you are going, is very rich and liberal. Your support and education are as nothing to her ; but she has never been used to young people or children, and the fear is, that you and Jimmy may trouble and annoy her. You will find it dull and stately. There will be little to amuse you ; for it is a great city-house, with only a small strip of garden ; but I think, with your good sense, and watchfulness over Jimmy, to keep him amused and quiet, you will win your way to her heart ; and that you should do for her sake as well as for your own. She is lonely, and with few to love her."

"How soon must we go to see our cousin?" said Jimmy, who had crept in during the talk.

Rhoda was like one stunned to see such an undreamed-of path open before her.

"I promised her I would bring you, if possible, on Saturday."

"So soon !" was all Rhoda could say.

"Yes ; it seemed her wish to see you at once ;

she was coming here with me. Aunt Debby's last letter told us to come; and that was a wonderful thing for Miss Esther to undertake, for she seldom leaves home except during the pleasant seasons of the year. So I think you had better let me make what preparations we can, and go at that time."

"But Jotham will need me. Martha won't come for three weeks yet, and Susy can't get along much alone," said Rhoda, her household cares seizing her again.

"No," said Jotham, his cheery voice a little unsteady; "if it is to be, I wouldn't have you make any difference on my account. You have been a dear, good little girl, and have worked harder than such a child should. I am glad all that is to be different; but I want you always to remember that you and Jimmy have a right here, and will always be welcome as long as I live." Saying thus, Jotham walked out to the barn, and they did not see him for two hours after.

"We must see what can be done before Friday night; for we must stay all night Friday at Dr. Winter's, to get off early Saturday morning, as it is only two miles to the station there, and six or eight here."

"What preparations?" said Rhoda, smiling a pitiful kind of a smile. "I was feeling quite like a woman this morning; but now everything seems so overturned from what I knew, that I feel younger, I believe, than I did when I came here



“ HOW WELL SHE REMEMBERED WHEN THE PICTURE WAS
TAKEN.” Page 164. Google

from Stonefield. I don't know anything; I don't believe Miss Esther will like me at all." Rhoda broke down, and cried heartily.

"Dear little girl," said her friend, "I think she will like you very much; and only think what a good, settled home it will be, and how you and Jimmy can go to school, and you can take any lessons you wish! So dry your eyes, and let us see what is in your wardrobe for a travelling-dress Saturday. I have been making what arrangements I could for Jimmy with Mrs. Winter. She says Arthur's clothes fit him; so she is going to get Miss Case, who sews for her, to make an overcoat and cap like Arthur's for him; and we can get him new boots when we go over Friday."

"You can take some of the money Mr. Burdick left, to pay for the things," said Rhoda, who had learned from Aunt Debby to count the cost.

"O, Miss Warren gave me quite a large sum to pay all expenses. Time is the only thing wanting."

"Jimmy had a new suit of brown cloth this winter, and Aunt Debby has been very careful of it; but I suppose he won't hurt them going — will he? They are very nice."

"O, no; he won't hurt them," said Mrs. Fields, laughing inwardly at the different ways Jimmy's clothes would strike Miss Esther and Mrs. Warren from what they did Rhoda.

"I have nothing but my brown merino; and I

have had so little time to sew this winter, that it has been worn a great deal, and looks rather shabby," said Rhoda. "I have had no cloak. Aunt Debby gave me her long-shawl, and I've worn that, and my last summer's hat. I put a brown ribbon on it, and it has answered for school and all."

Mrs. Fields remembered Aunt Debby's shawl, a yellow drab, plaided with blue. It was rather a puzzle what to do. She was anxious the children should make as good a first impression as possible.

"Do you remember whether there was any of your dress left?" said she, at length.

"Yes; Aunt Debby always got large patterns, because she made over so much."

"Well, you go and find it, and we will see what next."

While Rhoda was gone, Jotham came in.

"I wanted to tell you," said he, "that Aunt Debby spoke to me that last night about Rhoda's having any of her clothes, if she was here when Aunt Debby died. I understand now what a good deal she said meant, that I could not make out then. I think she thought she'd go sudden, and her call might come before you got here. If it would n't be asking too much, I'd be greatly obliged if you'd just run over Aunt Debby's things, and if there's anything of use for Rhoda, take it; and give some to Susy Blake, poor thing!"

So the next morning they made a fire in Aunt Debby's room, and all the contents of the tall,

slim-legged chests of drawers, and the big, burly bureaus were brought in. A vast collection of yellow linens and ancient ribbons and pongees and Canton crapes and woollen remnants and some mementos that had doubtless been touching and valuable to her; but the association died with her, and they were only rubbish to those who came after her. Rhoda took the breakfast-shawl she had knit at Christmas, and gave it to Jotham for Mrs. Easton. There was not much of value for Rhoda in the new life she was entering; but they laid aside some things as mementos. Mrs. Speers was sent for. She agreed to come and stay with Susy until Martha's arrival. She was quick with her needle, and Mrs. Fields directed her in altering and repairing Rhoda's dress, from the roll of merino that had been found. There was a large piece of three or four yards of heavy woollen cloth among the things, that Mrs. Fields cut a sack from by one of her own, and that made a nice finish to the brown merino. Then a remnant of black Lyons velvet grew, under her tasteful fingers, into a pretty hat, Mrs. Speers fitting a frame over her straw block; and Mrs. Fields's bonnet went home minus a feather and flower. By Friday afternoon all was finished. Mrs. Easton and Martha had come to see them before they left; and a very sad little company all were. Jimmy had made a farewell visit to all his pets, and Mrs. Speers sat holding him close to her,

on a low rocking-chair. Poor, feeble, whining woman! the joy of her heart, she said, was to be taken from her. It was so sorrowful, that Mrs. Fields hurried Jotham a little to have it over; and at length once more in the old covered wagon, with the same little trunk, Rhoda turned her back to the pleasant Southfield farm. Her tears blinded her so, that, although she looked back, all was indistinct. Jotham would not go into Dr. Winter's house; he felt so sad, that he was unwilling any one should see. He kissed Rhoda without a word; and taking Jimmy out, the little fellow clung round his neck and sobbed aloud. Jotham hugged him closely, then gently set him down, and with only a single good-by to Mrs. Fields jumped into the wagon, and drove away. Jimmy's overcoat and cap fitted him, and his delight in them, and in playing with Arthur, soon soothed his childish grief. Rhoda also recovered her spirits, so as to go to bed cheerfully, and to sleep better than she had since Aunt Debby's death.

The journey the next day was an exciting one to both children. It was now four years since they were brought to Stonefield. It was a tiresome ride, with several changes, and it was dark when they reached the city. Mrs. Fields was fatigued, and glad when she caught sight of her husband's face through the car window. They went out, Jimmy perfectly bewildered, and won-

dering what that row of fierce-looking men wanted, who crowded up to a line, and beckoned and shouted, "Catch! catch!" as he understood it, as they walked along. Dr. Fields was a tall, pleasant-looking man. He kissed his Molly, as he called his wife, and saying, "So these little folks are Rhoda and Jimmy," he shook hands with them, guiding them through the crowd at the same time.

"Here is the carriage," he said, after they had gone through miles of station, and passed thousands of hacks and express wagons, as it seemed to the children.

He threw open the door, and they got into a velvet-lined coach, the soft, luxurious cushions of which seemed to sink under them, and then rise up again, and rest every tired place. Jimmy wished he could see the horse, and was still more desirous when he knew there were two horses instead of one. But it was too dark; so he sat back, and enjoyed the gentle undulations of the carriage.

"We are to go to Miss Esther's, with the children, to take tea. I wanted to take you home, for I knew you would be tired; but she would hear of no such arrangement."

"It is best we should go. I do not wish to leave these little folks until I see them safe under their cousin's roof."

"I am glad you are to go with us," said Rhoda. The rest of the way Dr. and Mrs. Fields had so

many things to talk about, that the children said nothing more, but looked out at the busy, lighted streets. Now the light through some blue or scarlet jar in an apothecary's window would flash in their faces; then they would pass a theatre, with its row of lights along the front; then a hotel, where gentlemen could be seen smoking and reading; then a barber's shop, where a row of men sat with towels under their chins and heads tipped back, while other men brandished razors and shears round their faces and heads — rather a frightful sight to Jimmy, who could not at first tell what it meant. But before long these sights were all passed, and they began to go through more quiet streets, where the street lights and a look now and then into some pleasant gas-lit parlor were the only things to be seen, save tall rows of houses. At last the carriage stopped at a corner, where stood a separate tall house, not joined to another, as most were, but having a little space all round it. The light shone from the half circle of glass over the hall door, and could be seen through half-shut blinds. How tall and still and stately it stood! But they were getting out, even while Rhoda was looking. The hall door opened, and a very neat, stiff, dressed-up man stood bowing. They heard Mrs. Fields say, "How do you do, Burns?" as they went up the broad, white steps, and entered the warm, softly-lighted, and carpeted hall. It looked almost as long as a

church to the children, with the gently rising staircase at the farther end. But now a door opens, leading into it on one side, and a tall lady dressed in a trailing black silk, and with a black lace something on her head, that impresses with an idea of elegance by its flowing ends, looks out.

"O, you have come. Walk right in here."

"In here," is the pleasant sitting-room we visited the other day, and things are the same, except that Polly has retired into a fine cage in the housekeeper's room. Rhoda feels herself drawn forward by Mrs. Fields.

"This is Rhoda, Miss Warren."

Miss Warren takes her hand a little as though she did not know what to say to a little girl; but Rhoda, glancing in her face, saw she was looking kindly at her, and reached up and kissed her cousin's cheek. It touched Miss Esther, who kissed her back, and said, —

"I am glad to see you, my dear."

Jimmy walked up to her before she released Rhoda's hand, and said, —

"I am Jimmy."

This made her laugh, and she evidently liked the looks of the straightforward, little fellow.

"I know it was selfish in me to insist upon your coming here," said she to Mrs. Fields.

"Not at all; I wanted to come."

"Well, I am glad you did. Now let us go upstairs to the children's rooms. Then we will have

tea, and they may go to bed ; for you are all tired, I know."

The children followed the ladies up the wonderful staircase, leading from enchantment to enchantment. it seemed.

"I have had one of the front rooms prepared for Rhoda ; it connects with the little room over the hall, where I have had a bed put for James ; and I thought neither would feel lonely," Miss Esther says, as they go along.

"You are very kind, and it is a very nice way," Mrs. Fields replies.

We described Rhoda's room at Aunt Debby's, and we must tell of this ; but the children are too tired, and this chapter too long, to do it now. Suffice it to say that they ate their suppers in a kind of glamour, caused by fatigue and the elegance of their surroundings, went to bed and to sleep almost at the same minute ; and Mrs. Fields and her husband went home well pleased, promising to come in to-morrow, although it would be Sunday.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

THE Sabbath morning broke bright, and with quite a little flavor of spring in the air. The snow had been gone for several days in the city, and though March would doubtless soon re-assert itself, this morning it seemed willing to give a hint that it was one of the spring months. The children were told over night that breakfast would be at nine, and that they should be called in season. Rhoda, used to early rising, had been awake some time, waiting for the signal, when a tall clock she had noticed in the upper hall began to tell, in a slow, dignified manner, the hour. She counted one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Was it possible it was only seven? She began to think of Southfield; they were through breakfast then, Jotham was out in the barn doing up the chores for the day, Susy was washing dishes, Mrs. Speers was sweeping, dusting, and touching up generally; she could see every corner, hear every sound. It made her homesick. There she was of so much use, here what could she ever do? The house was full

of servants; she saw Burns and the driver and one girl last night, and they spoke of cook and housekeeper besides. Just then bells began to ring: she listened delightedly as softly and clearly an old hymn tune came sounding on the air; she had never heard chimes before, and they seemed to her like church bells in the heavenly city, instead of on earth. She could not have put her thoughts in words; but with the sound of the bells, each striking its own note, but all making part of the harmony, a little sense of the truth came to her, that each one doing his own appointed work in the place God puts him, is making part of the harmony sounding in the Lord's hearing; and she also felt that heaven must begin in our hearts on earth, if we would enter into its blessedness hereafter. Soothed and encouraged, she lay listening to the sweet sounds, when she heard Jimmy's voice.

"O, sister, do you hear that beautiful music?"

"Yes, Jimmy; those are chimes, I suppose."

She found she could not go to sleep again, so she began to dress and look around her. Jimmy was in a dear little room over the front door; it was a dressing-room for the large room Rhoda occupied, but it had been nicely prepared for the little boy. A complete set of pretty painted furniture was in it, each piece having landscapes painted on every available space. There were sea views and mountain scenes, all specimens of high

art to Jimmy. A little wardrobe stood against the wall, for his clothing; and the tiny bureau had a glass that would turn, so he could see the whole of his small person at once, which he was doing when Rhoda went in, standing on the bed in his nightgown. The arch between the rooms could be closed by a crimson curtain, now looped back. The large room was in the front of the house, of course, but not the one on the corner; that, they afterwards found, was Miss Warren's. Jimmy dressed himself quickly, and began to investigate both rooms; and, "O, Rhoda, look here!" and, "O, look there!" sounded through them, as he discovered the bath-room, leading from the room, the tall wardrobe, with mirrored panels, and saw the soft, bright carpets.

"Why, I never was in such a pretty place before — was I, sister? Do you think we are going to sleep here all the time? I shall have to wear my best clothes always — shan't I?" he ran on, without pausing for an answer.

Rhoda was opening a little trunk, but she concluded with him that their best clothes were none too good for their surroundings, and it was also Sunday; but she looked at her money, and said,—

"I will ask Mrs. Fields whether she will buy me a dress, and you some more clothes. I think we shall need them."

Before this, the clock had struck eight; and now came the expected rap on the door, and Rhoda

opened to a stout, elderly woman, very neat and very brisk. She spoke with a slight Scotch brogue, although Rhoda did not know then, what made her speech different from others.

"So ye are already up, Miss Rhoda and Master Jamie — are you?" said she, pleasantly. "I doubt not ye are used to early rising."

"Yes," said Rhoda, smiling; "I was thinking that at Southfield they were through breakfast an hour ago."

"Well, it's healthy rising betimes, I think. But I suppose you would like to know who I am, Master Jamie, ye look at me so hard."

"Yes," said he.

"Well, I am Mrs. Burns, the housekeeper."

"Are you Burns's wife?" said he.

"Yes; the same. Now, as ye are dressed, we will show ye round a trifle before Miss Esther comes down."

They found the housekeeper very kind and pleasant. She was a motherly body, and with her husband, in Miss Esther's employ for more than twenty years. She hired all the servants, and managed entirely the household department, while her husband had grown from waiter into a kind of steward, and was intrusted with a great deal of important business. Their only daughter and child was married, and lived on a farm in the interior of the state; and they talked now of going to her; but they were indispensable to Miss Warren, and

she to them ; so they were likely to stay for years to come. Burns himself was growing old, and fixed in his ideas, and at first fretted a little at the prospect of having two children overturning the ways of the house, which ways he believed to be the perfection of all household clock-work ; but his wife, who, unconsciously to him, ruled, soon talked him into toleration, if not pleasure. Her heart warmed to the orphans from the first, and she liked to think of hearing their voices in the still, dull house. Children and dogs know their friends ; and Jamie, as she called him, took her hand confidently as soon as they started on their journey over the house. The wonder and admiration of the little folks won Burns's heart, who loitered after them. He felt them to be children of taste in that they believed everything they saw to be the most perfect of its kind. When they came to the parlors Mrs. Burns opened a shutter, and a flood of light fell on the old portrait, and the same radiance shone on Rhoda's face as she stood looking spell-bound before it ; for she knew it was the one whose resemblance to herself had been noticed. Miss Esther came in unobserved, and stood with Burns, where she could see both the living and pictured face.

"One cannot doubt that is a Warren, ma'am," said he to his mistress, pointing slightly towards Rhoda. Miss Esther nodded and smiled. The

bell then rang for breakfast, and the children, seeing their cousin, said, "Good morning"; and they went into the dining-room, warm and sunny, and full of all convenient and elegant furniture.

"How do you like this house?" said Miss Esther.

"It is the most beautiful place I ever saw," said Rhoda, simply. "It is so different from where I've been, that I am afraid all the time that I shall not do right," continued she, blushing and smiling.

"I think you do nicely," said her cousin.

"I like it too," said Jimmy; "it's nicer than Aunt Debby's house; but I most wish there was a cow and horse and peacock here."

"O, there are two horses out in the stable that you can go and see to-morrow."

"Are there?" Jimmy's eyes shone. "What are their names?"

"Caliph and Sultan, I believe — are they not, Burns?"

"Yes, ma'am; Caliph and Sultan."

"What pretty names!" said Rhoda, brightly; "they make me think of the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"Do you like to read?" asked her cousin.

"Very much indeed."

"Well, after breakfast you may go into the library and find a book. Try to find one suitable for Sunday. I thought you were tired, and hardly

ready for church to-day. Next week we can have things in readiness for you to go."

Rhoda rather wondered what she could need more than she had. Her sack and hat seemed to her marvels of beauty.

"Mrs. Burns told me she had something to show me after breakfast," said Jimmy. "I like Mrs. Burns — I like Burns too," said he, looking pleasantly up at him, as he waited on the table. He always insisted on standing behind Miss Esther's chair.

Things were brought him from the cook, but no one else was allowed to wait upon his mistress. Jimmy was a very polite little fellow, as far as kindness of heart went, and that is the most important part; for the little manners and customs of good society can soon be acquired, if gentleness and consideration of others are in the heart. So the little boy was afraid Burns would not think he liked him unless he expressed it. Burns smiled. He was thawing under the pleasant, sunny ways of the children.

Said Rhoda, "I liked to hear Mrs. Burns call Jimmy *Jamie*; it is what my mother used to call him; but when we went to Stonefield all began to call him Jimmy, so I got in the habit of it."

"I think *Jamie* is best. Suppose we all call him so here," said Miss Esther.

So it was agreed. Just then Burns stooped and whispered to his mistress. She nodded and smiled,

and he left the room, but soon came back without bringing anything, but leaving the door ajar. In a few minutes they heard a very strange voice in the hall; some one seemed coming slowly along, talking. Finally the person, whoever it was, called, "Burns!" in a loud, harsh tone.

"What say?" answered he; but instead of telling what was wanted, the stranger burst into a loud laugh, then was still a moment.

"Miss Warren!" was the next call. She answered, and the same laugh was her only reply.

Jamie began to look rather wildly from one to the other, and Rhoda was afraid some crazy person was coming; but they saw that Burns and Miss Esther were laughing, so they sat still. It must be a very short person coming, for the voice was now close at hand, but it sounded almost on the floor.

"Burns!" was called again in the room; and yet they had both watched the door all the time, but Jamie spied it first.

"O, sister, sister, it's a parrot — a beautiful parrot!" and he ran away from the table to see better. But Polly did not like any such demonstration. She closed her mouth, and turned to waddle away again; but Mrs. Burns appeared with the little sandy garden and perch, and Polly was soon put upon it, with a chain to one foot.

"Now, Master Jamie, do not ye go too near her at first, for she is the one that can bite, when she



**"A FLOOD OF LIGHT FELL ON THE OLD PORTRAIT, AND THE
SAME RADIANCE SHONE ON RHODA'S FACE." Page 181.**

don't feel acquainted with people; but she will soon begin to talk," said Mrs. Burns.

Delighted Jamie could eat no more breakfast, but sat himself down to watch this new attraction, after asking to be excused. Miss Esther gave him two lumps of sugar — one for himself, and one for Polly, who looked askance at it for a while, but at length condescended to take it from him; and then, holding it against the perch with her claw, proceeded to crack it off and eat. Miss Warren had been in the habit of taking her breakfast in her room, but came down this morning, fearing the children would feel lonely. She had dreaded the exertion, but found that she had enjoyed it, and had eaten a more hearty breakfast than usual. The library was a large room, connecting with the sitting-room; and Rhoda was almost awe-struck when she gazed on the tall, carved cases, surmounted with the white busts gazing dreamily one at the other. The row upon row of beautifully bound books, and the still, hushed air of the room, with its soft-tinted wall and carpet; then the portfolios of beautiful engravings that stood in the stands around — everything so filled her artistic eye, she could only sit down with a sigh of perfect satisfaction; for she was alone, Jamie being still engaged with Poll. To think of finding a book among such a multitude, where should she begin? But on a table she saw a number of very large books, and upon looking, she found them to be a

splendidly illustrated edition of the Bible, in several volumes. She thereupon asked permission to look at them with Jamie, which she readily received; and Ann, the housemaid, was sent to open the register and window-shutters, and place chairs and a low table, that they might look at them conveniently. But Rhoda had been so used to waiting upon herself, that so much help wearied her. She had run up-stairs, after breakfast, to put her room in order, and found everything arranged. When Ann came, she fancied she looked a little hurried, so she said, —

"Please, Ann, let me do it myself. It must be near meeting time, and I am not going."

Ann went off gladly, and was Rhoda's friend at once. The pictures were delightful; and in looking at and talking about them, and reading the text, trying to understand the subjects, the morning passed. They were astonished when Mrs. Fields came in for lunch at noon. As she had a headache, she staid with them through the afternoon service, while the doctor and Miss Esther, who was a zealous church-goer, went. Rhoda had the opportunity to ask her friend about her money, and her own and Jamie's clothing.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Fields; "your cousin will do all that; she will not want you to mention it."

"But," said Rhoda, "I do not know what I am to do here. It seems so strange not to have any-

thing to do"; and she told of her room, and Ann's being sent to move the books and table for her.

"Miss Warren has no other idea than that you must be waited upon; she always was, and there are so many servants that they must have something to do; and the best way for you is to accept their services wherever she expects you to; but be sure not to get into a careless way, and make unnecessary trouble. You should be careful, too, to be considerate of the feelings of those that wait upon you. In regard to what you can do, if you watch for opportunities, they will come. I do not doubt you will find ways of being useful to your cousin herself, in reading to her, and assisting her in any way that may open."

"Another thing I wanted to ask you, what had Jamie and I better call her?"

"I will ask her when she comes." She did so, and it was decided that "Cousin Esther" would do.

In the evening Mrs. Warren and Walter came in. The children loved the gentle lady before she had been there an hour. Rhoda remembered Walter; and he thought that he should have recognized the children. The succeeding days of this first week passed quickly away, although by Saturday they felt as though a year must have passed since they left Southfield. Two women sat in the third-story sewing-room, working for them; and to ride in the carriage with Cousin Esther and Mrs. Warren, or Mrs. Fields, and visit stores, and see

counters covered with such magnificent fabrics (as they looked to her), and have dress after dress laid aside and know they were for her, was something so akin to fairy doings, that she could hardly force herself to realize it. The reason of the great haste was, that Mrs. Dyer's school was to commence the next Monday for her last term before the long vacation; and as it was the most desirable school in the city, and she had one vacancy, Miss Esther thought it best for Rhoda to begin at once.

"Why, Jamie," said she, after the first shopping expedition she attended; "do you know, Cousin Esther does not think this dress" (the brown merino) "good enough for school? She bought a bright plaid, that shone almost like silk; and I heard her tell Mrs. Warren that she thought that would make a good school dress. I know the man said it was a dollar and a half a yard."

Jamie did not care much about the dress, but he liked to see Rhoda pleased, and was a good listener, and she must talk to some one, of these things.

"But, sister, you have n't got such boots as I have?" said he. "Patrick says they are the finest boots he knows of."

Patrick was coachman, and carried Jamie on the seat with him, arrayed in new clothes and the fine boots, which arrangement satisfied both Jamie and himself.

"And," said Rhoda, going on, "she bought me

a blue silk, a real silk, for Sunday ; and there's a white dress and two lovely cambrics, one white and one green. She said, as she had a dress-maker, she might as well have several made at once. And I am to wear my new hat and sack to school while it is cool, and have a white hat trimmed with blue for Sunday. And there are handkerchiefs and stockings and such things for both of us ; more than we shall ever wear out, I believe."

Rhoda felt she was talking childishly ; but then she was so pleased, and Jamie was the only one hearing.

"But I feel rather useless," continued she, "doing nothing, while others are working for me. Only think, nearly a week that I have not done one thing. But next week I will study. I can do that ; and Cousin Esther is going to let me take music lessons, — won't I practise ! I don't think I shall make such a fuss as Luly Winter used to."

Rhoda went down-stairs again, determined she would do something for her Cousin Esther if she could ; and "Where there's a will there's a way." Her cousin was sitting at her interminable worsted work, and looked troubled about it. Rhoda went up beside her timidly ; she hardly knew how to recommend herself to this new relation. She was kind, and she was sure was not looking upon them as a burden ; but she did not seem to think they could do anything for her.

"I think your work is very beautiful ; I wonder if I could do it," said Rhoda.

"O, yes ; when you are a little older. But I am quite sick of this piece ; it has been very unfortunate. They did not send me the right colors at first from Furbisher's. And now I find that I have made a mistake. The whole leaf is wrong, and it is trying work to pick it out ; it hurts my eyes. I believe I will put it away."

"I could pick it out quickly, I know, if you would trust me."

"O, no ; thank you ; it is dull work."

"O, please let me try. I should so like to do it !"

"Well," said Miss Esther, "you may try."

She took it, and her handy fingers soon brought it back so carefully done, that the canvas was unpulled, and all in order again. Miss Esther was pleased ; worsted work was her hobby ; and to have some one interested and able to help in that, was something worth having. The ordeal of entering Mrs. Dyer's select school for young ladies, was a fearful one for Rhoda. She told Mrs. Fields how she dreaded it.

"Do you believe there ever was such a girl to have trying things of that kind to do ? Going to Stonefield with Jamie, was one ; then Aunt Debby ; then the academy at Northfield ; then here ; and now, before I can get my heart down in its place, it's got to go way up in my throat. Again, meeting a new teacher and so many strange girls. Not

but I am glad to go, but I feel as though I did not know where I belonged."

"You have had rather more to take upon yourself than most little girls; but this will not be so bad as you think; a day or two will shake you down into a fixed place, and then you can study away to your heart's content. I have been talking to your cousin about your music. I tell her you are so late in taking lessons that you will hardly be a brilliant performer; a child should begin young to finger well. But I think you will make a fine singer, and learn to play creditably enough, and to accompany yourself if needed. So she is going to put you under the best instruction in the city, and you must try to profit by it; for it will be a great gratification to her to have you accomplished."

The Monday came, and both children started. Jamie, under Ann's care, went to a school for small children, only a few blocks off, and Patrick drove round with Rhoda for Mrs. Fields, who was a friend of Mrs. Dyer's, to go with her. She thought of the day, in the preceding fall, when, with Jotham, she started for Northfield Academy. She seemed to herself like Cinderella after the fairy godmother had touched her, riding along in her new plaid, in the beautiful carriage, with Sultan and Caliph lifting their feet as though despising the ground; but she did not undervalue the old days. She thought of Jotham's kindness; she

saw Aunt Debby looking through her round-eyed spectacles from the open door; she seemed to smell the clear, hill air, and see the maples and birches, just putting on their gorgeous autumn dress; and thankful for the present and grateful for the past, the old hymn seemed to sound through her mind, "Thus far the Lord hath led me on"; so she arrived at Mrs. Fields's cheerful, and quite free from fear. Mrs. Dyer was a very quiet, serene lady, and Rhoda's heart kept down remarkably well; but when her friend left, and she was ushered into the beautifully furnished and carpeted school-room, and Mrs. Dyer said, "Young ladies, I am happy to introduce Miss Rhoda Thornton as a new companion to you," and as she, bowing, lifted her eyes to look into some thirty pair of eyes, she had to swallow hard to keep that indispensable part of her body from her very mouth, it seemed. She found it very different from Mr. Green's school. He toiled through all himself; here Mrs. Dyer did little but sit in the large school-room and have general oversight. Tasteful recitation-rooms opened from the main room, and a teacher presided in each, while a dapper, mustached Frenchman, and a heavy-bearded, spectacled German, made periodical visits; and a lady with a portfolio, who, she found, was the drawing-teacher, also came and went. But thanks to hard-working Mr. Green, she, on examination in all the standard studies of mathematics, grammar,

and geography, proved to be fully up to most girls of her age, while in reading and dictation Mrs. Dyer wished she had more such examples in her school; so she was promised to begin French, Latin, and drawing. When she mustered courage to look around her a little at her new companions, what was her not altogether pleasant astonishment to look full into Fanny Folger's pretty, delicate face. But instead of the little lady's old look of disdain, the expression was one of great amiability, and she bowed and smiled in a very charming manner. Straightforward Rhoda returned the bow, wondering much at the change; and though a thought that her difference of place and dress might be the cause came to her, she could hardly believe such small-mindedness, even of Fanny. But it was even so. Poor Fanny's mother was the cause of much of the weakness and folly of her daughter. They, of course, had heard from Northfield of the change in the prospects of Rhoda, and Mrs. Folger had given directions to her daughter to be very polite to the once despised Rhoda, should she attend Mrs. Dyer's school, as they heard she would.

"Now remember, Fanny," said her mother, "do not let your old dislike lead you to do anything else; for I tell you, if you can get into Miss Esther Warren's house, you are in one of the richest and most aristocratic ladies' houses in the city; and they say these children will be her

heirs. I hope you did not behave so at Northfield that she will not be intimate with you."

"No danger of that," said Fanny, with a toss of her head; "she'll be proud enough to have me notice her."

So that accounted for the smile and bow. After a while Rhoda's eyes started on another tour of observation. She looked over large and small girls, dark and fair girls, but all such unknown girls to her; but by making several trials of it she had glanced over nearly all the room, when a class came in from one of the recitation-rooms, and one girl looked at Rhoda very earnestly, almost as if she knew her; and there was something familiar about her to Rhoda, she could not tell what. She thought it over. The girl was taller than she was, but looked about her age. She was neatly and becomingly dressed, although not as expensively as some. She sat behind Rhoda; so she would not look round to see her again, but waited until she should go to another class; but before that, recess came. Fanny hurried over, and, shaking hands, introduced several of her intimates. They were the most frivolous girls in school: for like seeks like. Rhoda did her best to become acquainted, but their tattle was so uninteresting to her, being mostly about parties and shy allusions to Dr. Walker's boys. Dr. Walker had a boys' school near by, and the effort of Mrs. Dyer's life was to prevent her young ladies and his young

gentlemen from promenading the streets together. So, as I say, she found it hard to listen to her new companions, and began to watch for the familiar-faced girl. She soon saw her standing a little apart, but seeming to watch and listen to their party. Her face was turned away, so that Rhoda could observe her. A very bright face, not regular in features, but pleasing, with fine eyes, but rather an aggressive look in them, or a look as though they could flash if occasion warranted, and a mass of beautiful dark hair lightly confined in a net. What a strange resemblance to some one she had seen! She took opportunity, just as recess concluded, to ask Fanny who she was.

"O," — Fanny's nose turned up in the old way, — "that is Bessy Kent; she don't belong to our set at all; her father keeps a store somewhere. She is one of the hard-studying kind, and she will say awful sharp things sometimes."

Rhoda was not prejudiced against Bessy Kent by this account, but rather thought she should like her; but Bessy did not make any advances towards acquaintance, and several days passed on. Rhoda was heartily tired of Fanny and her set; but they appropriated her, not because they found her congenial, but because Fanny had told where she lived. One recess, towards the last of the week, she made an excuse to remain at her desk, and her tiresome friends adjourned elsewhere. Bessy Kent was also at her desk. They were in several

classes together, and Rhoda asked her some question about a lesson; she came instantly and sat down by her.

"I am glad to speak to you, Rhoda Thornton, though you dont know me."

"I have been trying ever since I came to know whom you make me think of. Did I ever see you before?" said Rhoda, looking at her steadily.

"I think you have, several times. I have your feather pin-show now."

"Why, *Lizy Carr!*" exclaimed Rhoda.

x

CHAPTER XI.

LIZY'S STORY.

LIZY laughed, and Rhoda saw the old look so strongly, that she wondered at her blindness before.

"I am Elizabeth Carr Kent, now," said she; "but no wonder you did not know me. I needed to change very much to be here, while you look almost just the same. I heard the girls talking of you, and saying you were coming here, and so I was looking out for you. How is Jimmy?"

"O, he is very well. Why, I am so surprised I can hardly speak. I am very glad to see you. How I wish recess was to be an hour long, so we could tell each other what has happened in these four years! How strange that we should meet here!"

Rhoda felt intuitively that although it was Lizy, yet it was not. The old faults and neglected look seemed to have passed away, and the lovable, bright qualities to have been brought out.

"We will try to have a good long talk soon," said Bessy, as we will now call her. "But I want

you to see one of my friends this recess. Fanny Folger and her friends do not like me very well; they do not care much for study, and I must care for it. My father (my adopted father, you know) is not very rich, and this is an expensive school; so I feel that I must try and get along as fast as I can. I sometimes get provoked, in my old way (you know how that was), and say things I had better not; but I try not to notice anything they do. When they took you up among them so fiercely, I stood off, for I did not know but you had changed into the same kind of a girl; but I could not believe it, and now I know it is not so. How I do want to tell you! But there is Mabel Grey, that I am going to introduce to you. You cannot know how good she has been to me. She is the first scholar in school, and will graduate this term. She is ever so much older than you and I. I rather think it has made Fanny and those girls jealous to have her notice me, for they all look up to her."

The girl spoken of came towards them now, smiling—a beautiful, graceful girl about seventeen. Bessy evidently worshipped her, and Rhoda was ready to join in the admiration. She sat down beside them, and talked so kindly, and took such an interest in their studies, that Rhoda felt a new light shone in her sky.

"I have heard of you, Rhoda, from Mrs. Fields. I went to her school once, and I have been waiting

for a good opportunity to speak to you. I am glad to see you and my Bessy together."

Just then the bell rang, and Fanny and her friends returned. They looked dissatisfied at seeing Rhoda's companions, but could not help themselves.

Fanny told her mother that night that she did not believe it was any use to try to make anything of Rhoda Thornton.

"She wouldn't go out at all this recess; and when we came back, there was Bessy Kent and that stuck up Mabel Grey talking to her, and she was looking just as pleased, while we can't get a word out of her, hardly."

"I wish Mabel Grey would talk to you," said her mother. "Why don't you try and be intimate with her? She is one of the oldest girls, and will be going into society in another year, and it would be such an advantage to you! Those girls you go with are a kind of showy nobodies."

"O, she always likes these poky, studying girls, and won't look at us because we like a little fun."

Poor Fanny! her ideas of fun were to evade Mrs. Dyer's rules, and walk with Dr. Walker's boys, or shirk her lessons and talk gossip and scandal which a little girl should have been ashamed to know.

Mrs. Dyer had but one session; and Rhoda was home just in time for dinner at three. She found from the first that her cousin was interested in

hearing her day's adventures, although she did not say much. It was many years since her school days, and as there had been no young girl or boy in the family to keep their memory fresh, Rhoda's and Jamie's relations seemed very amusing, and like new things to her. Jamie's stories were mostly of one Johnny Burrough, who had a wonderful toy horse that he rode. It went on wheels, but would prance and run along sidewalks; and he came to school with it, and had it stand in the entry until school was done. That was a wonder; but Patrick told him, when he went to the seaside, he could have a goat.

"Do we go to the seaside, Cousin Esther?" said Rhoda, when Jamie came to the goat of Patrick's promise.

"Yes; the latter part of June."

"I never saw the ocean. And is a real beach and shells there?"

"O, yes. The house overlooks the ocean."

"How delightful!" said satisfied Rhoda. "But, Cousin Esther," she began again, after thinking how to tell of her new-found old acquaintance, "there was a very strange thing in school to-day. The girl I told you of that looked as though she knew me, spoke to me to-day, and she is Lizy Carr — no, Bessy Kent. She has changed her name since she was at Mr. Harmon's, at Stonefield, when we were."

Miss Warren looked annoyed; the Stonefield

tarry of the children was a disagreeable subject; she wished she could blot the fact out, and it was not pleasant to think of an acquaintance of that time being in school. Rhoda saw the look, but went on. "She has changed so much that I did not know her at all until he spoke. She had never had any one to care for her, or teach her; and she was rather a troublesome little girl then. But now she seems to know how to behave very well, and is quiet and pleasant."

"I hope she did not say anything about where you had met."

"No, ma'am; we did not have time to say much, for she wanted to introduce me to one of her friends, and I was glad, for I have been rather tired of Fanny Folger's 'set,' as she calls them, and this was such a beautiful girl! She is seventeen years old, and will graduate this spring. She seemed to love Bessy Kent, and said she was glad to speak to me. Her name is Mabel Grey."

"O," said Miss Esther, relieved, "I know her; she is the daughter of John Grey, the lawyer. I like to have you form an acquaintance with her; she is very highly esteemed wherever she is known."

"I am glad," said Rhoda, "for she is just as dear to us smaller girls as she can be. She said she went to school to Mrs. Fields once. I want to see Lizy, — Bessy, I mean, — and hear how she came here, and where she is living now."

"You may take Jamie and walk over to Mrs. Fields, and ask her to inquire about this girl, and see whether she will prove a good friend for you; and then go into Mrs. Warren's and carry this letter I had from the farm this morning."

Mrs. Fields had an opportunity to ask both Mabel and Mrs. Dyer that evening, and what she heard was so satisfactory, that she told Miss Esther that with her permission she would let Rhoda ask Bessy to her house Saturday afternoon.

"You know I am an old schoolma'am, and am good at judging of girls; and then if she should be found wanting, she would not have made an entrance into Rhoda's home."

So this was done; and Saturday afternoon, Bessy, bright and interesting, made her appearance. Mrs. Fields was pleased with her, and soon won her confidence. After they had talked about school and the past week a while, Rhoda began, —

"But, Bessy, do tell me what happened to you to bring you here. You know about Jamie and me — don't you?"

"Yes; all the main points I know in regard to your coming, and my story is just as plain when you have heard it."

"Do you want me to go away, and let you tell Rhoda?" said Mrs. Fields.

"O, no; not unless you wish to; it may not be interesting to you."

"Yes, it will. I want to hear."

"Well," said Bessy, "I suppose you know from Rhoda what a disagreeable thing I was at Stonefield. I had a hard time then, for I was left an orphan when I was two years old; and one took me and another took me; and I was not a pleasant-tempered child; and I was knocked round; if there had been any one to start me in the right way, I might have done better; but it's no use talking about that. When Rhoda and Jamie were carried away I was just as lonely as I could be; and I thought a great many times of what you said, Rhoda, about my being smart, if I had a mind to try. Six weeks after you left, there came a letter from the city here to Mr. Harmon, inquiring whether there was a child there named Elizabeth Carr. They hardly knew it meant me; I had always been 'Lizy.' The letter was from Robert Kent, and said that he had accidentally heard that a child of that name, whose mother was a cousin of his wife's, was there. He had a sick daughter, and she was very anxious that I should be sent to them, if it was so. There were some business matters in the letter, proving it to be all right, and I was sent, gladly enough, on trial; for Mrs. Harmon said she knew I should be back in less than three months. I was sent just like a bundle in an express-man's care, to be called for. It was night when I got here; and I sat down hungry and tired, and frightened enough when I found there was no one there for me. But Mr. Kent came soon, and

he was very good to me ; but I was so miserable that I just cried to myself all the way in the horse-car we took to get home. And when I got there I was a forlorn-looking child enough — what with my poor clothes, and dust and tears. But mother Kent met me very gently, and took me into a pleasant, warm room, and washed my face, and talked so kindly that I felt quite comforted. But you know, I never knew then what to say, or what to do with my hands and feet ; but I could notice quick enough, and I saw that although father and mother were so kind, they had something troubling them ; and at first I thought it was because I looked and acted so ; but I soon saw that they were not thinking of me much of any. After supper, father says to mother, —

“ ‘ Alice will not want to see her to-night ; will she ? ’

“ ‘ I rather think she will,’ said mother, ‘ she has been so anxious all day.’

“ Father went out of the room and up-stairs ; and mother said, —

“ ‘ Our only daughter is very sick all the time ; she has been sick now two years. She has wanted you to come ever since we heard of you. Now, when you go up to see her, you will be still ; won’t you ? and try not to excite her, or she will not sleep to-night.’

“ So, when father came down, we went up. There in a large, pleasant room, on a white bed, lay

the sweetest-faced girl, — my sister Alice.” Bessy’s eyes filled with tears, and her voice trembled so she had to pause. “I can never talk of her without crying,” she began again; “when I think what she did for me, poor little savage. I could not say a word when I stood by her bed; but she held out her hand and drew me up and asked me to kiss her. ‘She is a nice little girl, mother,’ said she, ‘and we shall see that she will be a great comfort to us all here.’

“I found afterwards that she had an incurable spinal disease, and was a great sufferer. She knew she could never be well, and that her parents would be left childless; and the idea of taking poor me, and training me to be a comfort and help to them, had so taken possession of her mind, that she had persevered until I was there. I could talk all night, telling of what she did for me. Mother would get discouraged, and think I should never be anything but a wild, awkward trial; but Alice never despaired. Like an angel as she was, she would talk to me, and amuse and teach me, until I loved her so well that the thought of grieving her would prevent me from almost any fault. She never murmured or complained, no matter how much she suffered; she said it would be ungrateful when she had such a home and such parents. She lived nearly two years after I came; and she wanted father to promise to adopt me; legally they call it, — don’t they? At any rate my name was

changed to Kent, or Kent was added on. Now I think I am a comfort to them, for they know Alice was the one who assisted in fostering and bringing out whatever good there is in me. She always was careful to point out to me that of myself I could command but little strength, but helped by Him who helped her, I need never fall back into my old ways. So I have lived there; and if I ever should forget my sister Alice, or fail in love and obedience to my adopted parents, I should be the most ungrateful girl on earth."

Rhoda walked up to Bessy and kissed her, and Mrs. Fields drew them towards her.

"You both should remember the paths the Lord has led you in, and I am glad your ways have come together again for a while."

There was a pleasant surprise for the little girls, that Mrs. Fields had planned. After they had talked and listened until it was growing dark, some one rang the bell, and who should it be but Mabel Grey, come to take tea with them; and she brought an invitation from her mother that the next Saturday afternoon they should spend with her, for she was one of the unselfish young ladies, willing to entertain girls younger than herself. Miss Warren was very willing and much pleased to have Rhoda visit her, and the report concerning Bessy Kent was so favorable that Rhoda was told to have the little party invited to see her when another Saturday should come round.

Everything delightful seemed to the girls to be condensed into the afternoon at Mabel's. Jamie was invited also, for Mabel had brothers, none as young as Jamie, but young enough to enjoy playing with him; and rabbits, white mice, and puppies made the afternoon short enough for him, and he looked quite sourly at Ann, who came for him just after dark. Mabel promised to be at Rhoda's the next week, if possible, though she could not be there until dark. Meanwhile school went on successfully. Rhoda had found one or two more congenial friends, and every day she felt more and more at home. Fanny and her intimates, who knew everything going on, of course knew of the Saturday visiting. They showed the cold shoulder more plainly than ever to Bessy, but Rhoda they did not quite give up. Mabel was so above them that they could not reach her at all. Mrs. Folger was much tried, and told her daughter she must go and make a call upon Rhoda the next Saturday.

"It is too bad, after all the trouble and expense I go through for you, that you don't get along with the right girls; this Bessy Kent must be a very artful girl."

"O, she is," said Fanny.

"I wonder Miss Esther Warren will let Rhoda Thornton get mixed up with such people. What did you tell me her father did?"

"Why, he keeps a hardware store down town;

and Matty Pierce says she has been by the house they live in, and it is in a common brick block ; and they don't keep any carriage, and only one servant."

"I don't believe Miss Warren can know," said foolish Mrs. Folger.

When Rhoda reached home the Friday afternoon before she was to have her company, Burns handed her a little square package.

"That came by express for you to-day, Miss Rhoda."

"For me? Who could send me anything?"

She hurried into the sitting-room where her cousin sat, and opened it. It was a paper box, and in it a beautiful cake, frosted, and decorated. There was a letter on top.

"What does it mean?" said she.

"You will have to read your letter to find out," said her cousin This is what the letter said :—

DEAR RHODA AND JIMMY :—

We were glad to have word of your safe arrival, but we have missed you every day. Mam Speers cried so much that John was afraid she would be sick, and I did not know but she would all dissolve. But things got along pretty well, and last Tuesday I brought Martha Harris over here, and things are all straight now, I tell you. We did not have any wedding, on account of Aunt Debby's death, but mother Easton must make cake, and one little loaf was on purpose for you. Mother Easton has a touch of the rheumatiz, and Susy Blake has gone over there for a spell ; she's done first rate since you went away. Good-by. My wife and I both want to see you very much, and hope you will both come to the old place some time.

Yours

JOTHAM HARRIS.

P. S. The peacock has shed almost all his tail-feathers; I guess for grief at Jimmy's going away. He is a pretty scaly looking bird, when he thinks he's making a spread. I have cut some of the eyes off his dropped feathers, and put them under the paper in the bottom of the box.

There they were; and Jimmy was delighted. He ran with them to Mrs. Burns' room, and she tied them in a beautiful fan shape and put them above his looking-glass, so that he could see them when in bed.

"I am glad this came to-day," said Rhoda; "I can have it cut for the girls to-morrow."

"Yes," said Miss Esther; "it will be very nice. You must write and tell of the safe arrival of the package, and thank them; and I will try to find some little present you can send by mail to Martha."

"I did not know you could send anything by mail but letters," said Rhoda.

"O, yes; almost anything by paying letter postage."

Rhoda ran off to write her note; and Miss Warren, who was just going for a drive, brought back a beautifully embroidered collar and cuffs, that could be put into a large envelope with Rhoda's note.

"O, Cousin Esther, how much obliged to you I am! and Martha will be delighted; she likes such things; but up there, you know, they seldom have them."

She had been so used to responsibility, that she could not help thinking what she should do to amuse her company the next day ; everything had been so delightful at Mabel's. But Cousin Esther and Mrs. Burns were equal to the emergency. Mabel could not come until dark ; but her brother Willy, eleven years old, came to see Jamie. So Patrick harnessed Caliph and Sultan, and carried Bessy and Rhoda, with both boys, out for a long drive, away from the city. So when Fanny made her call she could only leave her card ; and she and her mother afterwards met the girls enjoying their ride. Then Mrs. Burns got out the old, rare silver that Rhoda had never before seen ; and all delicate and dainty viands added to their enjoyment ; and then Mrs. Warren and Walter Waring, with Mr. and Mrs. Fields, came in, and music and pictures finished out the pleasant evening. Mrs. Warren said to Miss Esther, —

"I hope we shall live to see Rhoda and Jamie grown up ; it is so pleasant to enter into young society again."

Bessy's father came for her, as he had before, and invited Rhoda and Jamie to visit Bessy the next Saturday ; and Miss Esther accepted for them. They all liked Mr. Kent very much ; he was a quiet, gray-haired gentleman. He looked wistfully at Mabel whenever he saw her. His Alice was sixteen when the disease of which she died seized her.

"I cannot expect you will have such a nice time with me as I have had with you," said Bessy to her friends the next week; "but I want you to come, and father and mother want you."

When the day came, Arthur Winter was at Mrs. Fields's, and Jamie was excused from going to Bessy's; but Mabel went early; she wanted Bessy to see that she honored her invitation and wished to visit her. They found a very pretty, comfortable home. Mrs. Kent was a pale-faced lady, a little saddened in her looks. She could not quite forget her own loss in her Alice's gair; but she was much pleased to see Bessy's friends, and showed them all she could find to amuse them. She talked with Mabel of Alice, who loved to hear of the gentle, sick girl. At last she brought down some old music that had belonged to her father, a music-teacher. There was a good piano in the front parlor, but in the back parlor stood a queer-looking thing, covered with a cloth too large for a table. Mrs. Kent uncovered it, and it was a little, jangling, old piano, one of the oldest in the city; so the girls opened it, and Mabel played the old music on the clattering keys, until they were breathless with laughter. After tea Bessy entreated her mother to let her bring down the old dresses from the trunk in the garret; and quaint, old, short-waisted silks, and high-heeled boots, and enormous bonnets came out; then Mabel must be dressed in them; and when she

stood like a French marchioness of the old time, with puffed and powdered hair, and tottling on her slipper-heels, her admiring friends thought her more beautiful than ever. They were chattering so fast that the bell was unheard; and Mr. Grey and Walter Waring stood among them before they knew it. Walter was studying with Mr. Grey; and having volunteered to Miss Esther to go for Rhoda, Mr. Grey concluded to go too, instead of sending the carriage; so Bessy's company was just as much a success as the rest.

The days began to grow long and warm, and the scholars to feel anxious for vacation. As June bloomed on, Jamie began to look pale and languid; he missed the farm life. Miss Esther took him from school, and let him run and ride more; and preparations began to be made for the flitting to the seaside as soon as Mrs. Dyer should close her school. Time, as usual, never stopped until the last day came. Rhoda and Bessy both grieved and exulted; grieved that Mabel was to leave, exulted at the praise and honor with which she graduated. Before this Rhoda had returned Fanny Folger's call, but no intimacy had followed. Fanny now returned to Northfield; and the next week found Miss Warren and her charges at her beautiful cottage overlooking the sea. Rhoda could never be tired, it seemed to her, of sitting on the cliffs, watching and listening, — wave after wave, all day and all night. She used to wake to

listen sometimes, first the deadened little roar, then splash; roar—splash; they were always coming. Jamie ran along the beach, and dug in the sand all day. He was never told to keep his clothes clean, for he was covered from head to heels in large overalls, and roses and sunburn covered his face. He ate until his friends stared, then went out and dug, and came in to eat again. After supper he just managed to tumble into bed before he was asleep. After a while the promised goat and a little cart came. I will copy the letter he wrote Jotham; that will tell his feelings and exhibit his spelling, for it was sent as he wrote it.

DEAR JOTHAM,

I am at the see side. I have got a gote his name is bily he drags a cart. I get in the cart and he drags me. Patric says he is a bully bily I want to see you and mam speres and Jon Speres how is Charly my goat can go fast as Charly he can go most as fast as cusin Esters horses. I want to see you very Much and susy

From

JAMES W. THORNTON.

P S how is the peacock.

Rhoda went to the city every Thursday to take her music and singing lesson, and her practice made a pleasant occupation, and prevented the days from growing monotonous; for they were not at one of the fashionable watering-places, where the town follies flourish more vigorously than in the city itself. It was a quiet fishing-town, built on a cape that looked far out into the ocean;

and Rhoda thought sometimes of Aunt Charity's story of the witches that flourished where the winds howled and mists drifted, and waves broke forever on the beach. Now the treacherous sea put on its most bewitching and enticing face. On one of Rhoda's trips to town she had permission to bring back Bessy; and the week she was there they fairly revelled in pleasures which the ocean gave them. Equipped in scarlet flannel, they frolicked in the breakers under the watchful eye of Sam Bowler, an old fisherman, who had devoted himself to Miss Esther's household ever since the cottage was built, which was by Miss Esther's father. Jamie haunted the old man's steps, and he had taken very kindly to these new comers. He caught fish for the family, carried parties in his sail-boat, told the girls about the tides, and where to find moss and shells; and once in a while Miss Esther would let them sail awhile with him; but she dreaded the sea, although she loved the sea air.

It is strange how things come about; how we pick up links here and there, that seem to show we are all parts of some great whole that our little material eyes cannot take in. One day Rhoda sat in the shadow of a rock, watching the ocean and Sam alternately, when she heard Jamie — who was overseeing Sam put the finishing touches to a toy boat that the little boy wanted to sail in a little sea left by the tide — tell, that Jotham was used to put in a mast so and so.

"Well, I reckon Jotham was a land-lubber if he did," said Sam. "He never smelt salt water," continued he, trying to tease Jamie.

"No, he isn't a land-lubber," said Jamie, "and he has smelt salt water," cause he used to make brine on the stove to pickle meat in."

Sam indulged in a gruff old laugh.

"Yes, yes; that's just the kind of salt water he smelt. I knew it."

Jamie had a good mind to be angry with Sam on account of his derision of Jotham; but self-interest prevailed, as it does in older people sometimes. He was afraid he might not get the boat, which was growing into more symmetry and beauty than Jotham's ever had, he could see; so he cast about to think of some excellence of his old friend.

"You could n't raise such cabbages on this sand round here as Jotham does," said he.

"So he's a cabbage head too—is he? Why, where does this wonderful Jotham live?" said Sam.

"Up at Southfield, the most beautifulest place in 'the world; there's such a peacock there! He's lost most all his tail-feathers now, 'cause he's sorry I ain't there: Jotham sent some of them down to me in a box "

"I wonder if Southfield is near Northfield," said Sam.

"O, yes," answered Rhoda; "the towns join.

We lived only two miles from the line ; and Mr. Easton, whose daughter Jotham has married, was two miles the other side, in Northfield."

"Well, that is curious," said Sam, pausing from his work ; "I had an own cousin from here, who married an Obadiah Easton, from Northfield. They went out West ; and she lives out there, a widow now."

"That was our Mr. Easton's brother, I think," said she ; "for I heard Aunt Charity — that is Mr. Easton's sister — tell about her brother Obadiah's wife, that came from the Cape. I was thinking of Aunt Charity the other day, and her story about witches, but I did not think it was this cape. Is it not queer? I never thought to hear about brother Obadiah's wife again!"

"Drusilla was a one to tell witch stories ; and she believed in them too. There's your boat, Jamie ; now go and sail it."



"YOU COULDN'T RAISE SUCH CABBAGES ON THIS SAND ROUND
HERE AS JOTHAM DOES." Page 215.



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CHAPTER XII.

SUNSHINE.

"YES; she believed all the stuff she used to tell, Cousin Drusilla did," continued Sam. "Now, I've followed the sea nigh forty years, and I've seen many strange things, and known of many wicked doings; but I never found anything worse than men. Folks try and put off things on to the devil and witches, that they ought to shoulder themselves. I used to have long, lonesome watches on shipboard, when I would think about such things. The Bible tells us that 'the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked'; and it used to seem to me, as it does now, if we just got that cleared out, all ship-shape, the Lord would take care of the powers of the air, that Drusilla used to tell about and be afraid of. But it is queer you should have heard her yarns way out there."

"Did you always live here?" asked Rhoda.

"No; I was born up in New Hampshire; I was a farmer's boy till I was nigh on eighteen. But I was bound to go to sea, as plenty of foolish boys

are. My father had a brother who owned and sailed a fishing smack down here, and hearing about him set me out. I had older and younger brothers ; so my mother and father consented, and I came here and went a voyage or two with my uncle. Then I shipped on a whaler, and went voyage after voyage, way up among the icebergs, over in the Pacific, and all round ; I've navigated all waters. It's a hard life ; but when one once starts on it, nothing else ever seems natural ; and those that follow the sea generally keep it up till they settle down close by it, in some such broken-down way as I have."

"Follow the sea," said Rhoda, looking dreamily off over the blue broad plain ; "it looks pleasant enough such a day as this, the waves roll in so sleepily. Those tiny sails we can just see look so peaceful, and like birds coming home ; but the ocean is such a thing to wake up. Last week, after that windy night, Bessy and I stood here the next day, and the waves came roaring, with white crests higher than our heads, and pieces of boards and other things washed in along the beach ; and over against the rock there, the spray dashed up like a great fountain."

"Yes ; it is rather a scary thing, I can tell you, to feel a great ship roll and shake and creak, and be tossed about like a cork, in great, tumbling masses of water, with gray sky above, and nothing but waves and sky to be seen ; but, then, it don't

seem unpleasant to me to think of it now. But as I get older, I find myself thinking about when I was on the farm at home more than I used to. My father and mother have been dead twenty-five years, and I've never been up to the old place but once since. My youngest brother lives there now, and he has told me to come there and stay; but you see I could n't be of any use there, while here, with my boat and my little cabin, I can get along, and do pretty well. I had a letter from there last week, and my brother's daughter, who is married, and lives at home, had twin babies, and she had named one Samuel Bowler. She was a pretty little girl when I saw her, and took a great notion to me; and she had n't ever forgotten me, it seems."

"I should think you would be very glad to have a baby named for you. I like babies; but nobody I know, has any little child," said Rhoda.

"Yes; I am glad. Twins, I reckon, run in our family. As soon as I read the letter, I thought of a story my mother used to tell us children about our great-grandmother—great or great-great; I don't know which. Any how, she lived back in Indian times."

"What was it?" said Rhoda and Jamie, who had just come from sailing his boat, to tell of its sailing qualities. Hearing the word *Indians*, he crowded up. Indians and lions, tigers and crocodiles, were absorbing subjects to him.

"My mother used to tell it that our great-grand-mother was a young woman at the time, and had a pleasant home of her own — only a little house, with one large room on the floor ; but she and her husband thought it good enough. She had twin babies three months old. The Indians used to be very troublesome at times ; and when they were ugly, all the women and children would go into a garrison-house, as they called it, and the men would work, with guns loaded and close at hand ; and they would all be scared and crowded and uncomfortable."

"What is a garrison-house, Mr. Bowler?" said Jamie.

"O, a large house that they made with places all round where they could peep out and shoot through, but where the windows were all fixed so they could shut them up with boards ; and then everything cut way round, so they could see the Indians when they came. A kind of fort, in fact."

"I suppose if they saw an Indian, they would shoot him just so," said Jamie, drawing an imaginary gun to his shoulder with a tremendous bang.

"Yes. Well at this time they were very quiet ; for some months not an Indian had been seen ; but all at once rumors began to come of danger from them. They attacked and killed two or three families over in the western part of the State, and everybody began to be scared again, and those who lived a little out came into the garrison ; but

my grandfather and grandmother concluded to stay at home until something more was heard, and the alarm began to die away; but just then word came that my grandfather's father lay very sick at his home about twenty miles away, and wanted to see his son very much. His journey would be towards the coast, and where it was thicker settled; so there was n't much danger for him, but he felt unsafe to leave his wife and babies; she could n't go with the two, for they had to ride on horseback altogether then. Well, he tried to persuade her to go to the garrison-house; for he would be away two or three nights; but no. She was so comfortable, she could n't bear to carry those two babies where it was so crowded; she was n't afraid; there had n't been a sight or sound of Indians since spring, and 't was now October. Well, he let her have her own way, as men 'most always have to let women, though he rode away feeling uneasy; for she was full a mile from any other house. She went on through the day as usual. She felt lonesome without her husband; but taking care of the little ones and doing her work kept her busy, and when it came dark, and she'd eat her supper, and got the babies to sleep, she was ready to go to bed too; so she covered up the fire with ashes, so as to keep, and barred her door, putting out her candle, and opening the window curtain; for it was moonlight, and she thought it would make it lighter and

more cheerful. She soon went to sleep, though she was alone on the edge of the woods; but women in those days grew to be bold and fearless, and used to danger. She used to judge it was about midnight she woke up that night, hearing strange voices. Her bed was in a dark corner of the room; but the moon showed things out of doors plain enough, and I reckon she wished she was at the garrison-house; for there by the window, and some with their faces pressed close to the glass, stood some ten or fifteen Indians! They were 'braves,' as they called the fighting men, all painted and armed as they go in war time, jabbering and talking, and trying the door. There she lay, a baby each side of her. She could hear the soft little breathing of both; but the question was, how long would they sleep? One little cry, and she was a dead woman, and they dead children. She raised her head, so as to look at the fireplace; she was afraid she had n't covered every spark, and if the Indians saw a coal, in they would come; then she tried to hear what they were saying, for she could understand Indian talk some; but they spoke all together, and so fast, that she could only now and then catch a word. At last, after staying until she was afraid she should scream, and let them know herself that she was there, they took one more good look into the room through the window, and she understood

one to say that there was nobody there ; they were all at the garrison-house ; and so they went away at last. She laid awake until morning, and soon after sunrise she appeared at the garrison-house, with a baby on each arm, and staid until her husband come home. War soon broke out, and they had an awful time with the redskins ; but she and her husband and babies went to his father's, where they were safer. This company of Indians was on its way to join others. The night they stopped at my grandfather's they war n't strong enough to attack a garrison ; but they were looking for single families."

"I am very much obliged to you for telling us this," said Rhoda. "I believe I like to hear stories as well as Jamie."

"My," said Jamie, "don't I like to hear stories about Indians ! Don't you know any about crocodiles ?"

"O, Jamie, Mr. Bowler has told us a long story ! You must wait until another day ; besides, there's Ann coming to call us."

"Miss Warren wants you to come in ; she has something to tell you, Miss Rhoda," said Ann.

So they said good-by to Sam, and went home.

Cousin Esther was sitting in her favorite seat on the veranda, with an open letter in her hand. She looked pleased, as though she had something to tell that would gratify Rhoda.

"What do you think my letter from my sister tells me ?" said she.

"I cannot imagine," said Rhoda.

"Well, Mrs. Fields has a little daughter two days old; and she sends word, when you go in for your lesson next week you may go to see it."

"Why, Cousin Esther, how delightful this is! I can hardly wait. I wonder what they will name her."

"'Mary Warren,' for my sister and herself; they are both Marys, you know."

"Well," said Rhoda, "a great many strange coincidences happen to me. Only a few minutes ago I was telling Sam Bowler how much I liked babies, and that none of my friends had one."

"It seems to me Sam opens his heart to you and Jamie. I never heard him say much more than 'Yes, ma'am,' and 'No, ma'am,' in all the years I've known him."

"I suppose he is afraid of you, Cousin Esther; but he seems to like to talk to us children. But to think of that baby, little 'Mary Warren Fields,' it is too good."

Rhoda went prepared to admire the new-comer; but the first view was a little disappointing. A fat, good-natured woman, called Mrs. Hawly, came bringing a little bundle of scalloped flannel into Mrs. Fields's upper sitting-room, where Rhoda waited, and proceeded to lay back fold after fold, until, squirming and red, and with blinking little eyes, Miss Mary Warren Fields appeared, and greeted her new friend with a shrill little "Yah!" and imme-

diately grew more red-faced, and rubbed her little fists into her eyes, and tried to eat up said fists, and had to be trotted and hushed. But Rhoda had sense enough to know she would not be that way long, and in anticipation of the coming months, she kissed and held her, and went away pleased enough.

When she reached home that night, she was told two old ladies had been there to see her.

"Two old ladies," said she, puzzled; "who can they be? Did they leave their names?"

"No," said Ann. "I went to the door, and they asked for you, and I said you were in town for the day, and asked who should I tell called; and they said, never mind, maybe they would see you before long."

"How did they look?"

"Well," said Ann, "they were kind of queer looking old women. One was very tall and thin, and the other was very short and fat, and they both had on spectacles. I asked them, would they like to see Miss Warren, and they said 'No'; so they went off."

"I cannot imagine who they could be," said Rhoda. "Cousin Esther, who do you think they could be?" But Miss Warren was equally puzzled, so they gave it up; and Rhoda began to open the bundles of worsteds she had brought, and give various messages that Mr. Grey had sent to Miss Esther; and then to tell of the baby; and of

the commendations of her music teacher (for she found her cousin was gratified to hear of her progress). So the matter passed from her mind.

The next morning was unusually bright and beautiful, and Rhoda stood long at her window admiring the ever restless waves, and the calm, blue sky, and turned away thinking this a morning for the beach. When she was seated at the breakfast-table, Jamie began, "Now, I say, sister, what are you going to do to-day?"

"Well, I have no particular plans. What do you want me to do?"

"Why, you have n't been down on the beach for a good long stay, since that day Sam Bowler told us those stories. You keep play, play, playing on that piano. Now, I want you to go down and stay; sit there ever so long so I can sail my boat; and if Sam is there, have a long talk. Ann ain't near so much fun as you, to have go." (Jamie's grammar was much mixed yet.)

"Maybe I have rather slighted you and the beach this week," said she, laughing; "and if Cousin Esther has nothing she wishes me to do for her, I will take my crocheting and go. I'll put off practising until after dinner."

"I would go if I were you," said Miss Warren, "as Jamie seems to have set his heart upon it. What are you going to crochet?"

"Some little sacks for the baby."

"I expect we shall all have to be making things

for that baby," said Miss Esther. "I must think up some worsted knitting to do for her, as winter is coming."

The day was doubtless hot and oppressive inland, but in her shaded nook among the rocks, the ocean breeze blew strong enough for comfort, but not enough to interfere with her work, which was soon growing rapidly under her swift fingers. She was in full sight of Jamie, which seemed to be all he wished. Sam was nowhere to be seen; but several crabs were belated and left out by the tide, and Jamie had occupation with them; and the pebbles and shells were to be collected after every tide, and they were carefully carried up to the house, and put in a large chest that stood in the carriage-house, Jamie confidently expecting they were all to be transported to the city. Rhoda used to go to look at him, and give him a kiss, every night before she went to bed herself; and she told Mrs. Burns she was almost afraid to step round much for fear of crushing some crab or star-fish; and his pockets she used to turn carefully at arms length, knowing not what specimen of sea life might come tumbling out. At length, after an hour had gone by, she let her work fall in her lap, and began to watch the waves ever coming, and to listen to their beat; but strangely enough, soon instead of white-capped ripples, she was looking over rolling green meadows, and listening to hot winds murmuring through tree-tops,—

and she was thinking of Southfield. "It's almost blackberry time up there," thought she; and began to wonder whether Martha would make as much jam and syrup as Aunt Debby used to, and whether that she made herself last year was all eaten. It seemed strange to think it was only last year she made it; it seemed ages ago! How she would like to look in at the house for a little while. Just then she became aware of some one approaching, and she turned to see the two old ladies, the one tall and thin, the other short and fat, advancing towards her. The short one, being near her level, her first look was at her face. She was sure she never saw her before. It was a pleasant old face, with a puckered-up, round mouth, and wide-open, credulous, blue eyes looking through the silver-bowed spectacles. No, she never saw her before; so she looked up at the long, thin face of the other. Yes, she had seen her; but where, for a second she could not recall; but her reveries helped her.

"Why, Aunt Charity Easton, how do you do?" said she.

"Well, you knew me quicker'n I thought you would," said the old lady, much gratified at her reception. "I wouldn't tell my name yesterday, for I wanted to see if you'd know me. This is my sister-in-law, Mis' Easton." Rhoda shook hands with her. "She come on from the West this summer to visit her relations. She's been

up to Northfield a spell, and now I've come here with her. This is where she come from. So her cousin, Samuel Bowler, told us about you being here, and I thought I'd try and see you, for I knew how they'd question up at Jotham's."

"I am very glad you have tried," said Rhoda; "for I want to hear all about Southfield and Northfield people."

"Then having things so grand ain't made you forget them up there, has it?"

"Why no, Aunt Charity" (she was not very rightly named). "You would n't think such a thing as that of me, would you? Come, won't you go up to the house now?"

"No, I guess we can't this morning," said Cousin Drusilla, who now spoke for the first time, in a kind of high, plaintive voice.

"I told my niece we'd be back by twelve o'clock. We can sit down here on the rocks awhile. I like to get all the sea breeze I can; it seems dreadful good to me. I've missed it so many years."

"How long since you were here?"

"It will be twenty years next spring since we went out to Indiana, and I've never been this way since; I was left with such a large farm when my husband died, and the children none of 'em grown up, so I never could find a time to leave; but my children are all men and women now; my youngest son was married last spring, and I determined I'd see the East once more. But I find a great

many changes in twenty years. There's Martha, she was n't quite two years old when I went away; now she's married and settled, and I find everybody looking so much older, and I don't doubt I do myself. There's nothing but the sea that looks just as it used to." She stopped, a little out of breath; - it was evident that Brother Obadiah's widow was a great talker.

"How long is it since you left Northfield?" asked Rhoda of Aunt Charity.

"Last week. We came to the city first, to Drusilla's nephew's, and then we came here to her niece's day before yesterday."

"You see, my sister Sarah Jane," Drusilla began again, "left eight children, and they are all living and married, and scattered round in different places, and I shan't feel easy to go back without seeing them all, and it will take me some time. I want to be back in Northfield among my husband's relations by Thanksgiving time, and I said to Charity she'd better come down here with me; but she thought first she would n't, but we both had a dream the same night. She dreamed she —"

Here Jamie came rushing up, having just discovered the company. His appearance and introduction caused a diversion in the conversation, of which Rhoda was glad, for she wanted to hear about Jotham and Martha, and not about dreams.

"Well, Aunt Charity," said she, "please tell me

about Jotham and Martha and how things are looking at the old place."

"O, pretty much the same as they used to; they ain't made much change. They are taking lots of comfort, but I'm afraid they'll be too extravagant. Martha she likes to dress up and go round, and Jotham he likes to have her," said Aunt Charity with a little sigh. "He's bought her a silk gown, blue; she had one when she was married, a gray one. Now, I think, one silk gown at a time is enough, and I told her so; but it made no difference; and then she had a dressmaker to make it. I said all I could against it, and offered to cut it myself for her (Rhoda did not doubt it. She remembered Aunt Charity's advice was always given, asked or unasked); but no, she must have a dress-maker; so nobody knows how much it cost."

"But then, young folks will be young folks," chimed in Drusilla. "I always found it so with my children. I think Martha has got a very good husband, well to do, and a good provider. She showed me the things you sent her. She wore them with the new silk, the day she went to the donation party over to the minister's at Northfield Centre, you know, Charity."

"Yes," answered that lady, a little grimly; "that was another extravagance; instead of carrying over things that they had a great plenty of, they carried over just the most costly. Now Martha

can get ten cents a pound more for her butter that she makes from them new cows of Jotham — what does he call 'em?"

"Alderney," suggested Rhoda.

"Yes, that's it; well, she can get ten cents a pound more than anybody else, and what does she do but carry ten pounds of that butter that day; and then Jotham, instead of carrying vegetables as he might, took over money — I could n't just find out how much; I told him he'd find all his neighbors would carry over garden sauce, and such things. He said he knew they would, and that's why he thought the minister might like something else for a change; but prudence is a great thing, I think."

"Where is Susy Blake?" now asked Rhoda.

"She's over at Brother Daniel's this summer. They mean to keep her at one house or the other; but she don't know much."

"No, poor Susy is not overburdened with sense," said Rhoda, smiling at her remembrance; "but she is a good-natured girl, and does the best she can."

"And that's all the most knowingest of us can do," said the widow; "she's real helpful about doing the heavy work; but how dreadful scared she did get week afore last, and I don't wonder. 'T was a warm night, and her window was open, and she says somebody came right up to that garret window, and hollered right in, 'Susy' loud as they

could screech. Daniel said he heard it, and 't was a screech owl; he says they've been uncommon plenty up there this summer, so maybe it was; but I don't know. The powers of the air are to be dreaded I think." Rhoda thought of what Sam had said, and could hardly help laughing. Just then Sam came along. He looked quite spruce, for he was going up to the niece's to take dinner with the ladies. "Well, you found the one you were looking for," said he to Aunt Charity.

"Yes, and she knew me in a minute."

"I should know any one from up there very quick. I am glad enough to hear from there directly," said Rhoda. "Won't you come up to the house and see my cousin while you are here?"

"No," said Cousin Drusilla, "I guess we shan't have time, we've got so many places to go to; you see I want to go all round, where I used to go when I was a girl; but, dear me, when I was a girl I did n't have such a load of flesh to carry round; and then I'm short breathered and lame too, so it's pretty slow work visiting the old places. I want to go over on the other road, Sam, to where the Bunkers used to live; 't was at a husking there, I first saw my husband, you know. Do you suppose Charity and I could walk there some day?"

"You'd find it a matter of two or three miles," answered he.

"I'm afraid we'll have to give it up," said she;

"but it must be twelve o'clock and we'd better be walking."

"Where does your niece live?" asked Rhoda.

"In that small, white house over on the point," said Sam.

Then they said good-by, and left.

Miss Warren was much amused by Rhoda's account of her visitors. "I suppose," said she, "it would not amuse them to come here; but is there not some way you could show them a little attention?"

"I don't know of anything, unless you should be willing to take them to ride. They were regretting that they could not get over on the other road a mile or two; for they both seem old and lame to walk so far."

"That will do very well. If you like, Patrick can take you and Jamie round this afternoon, and they can go anywhere they wish; the horses need exercising, and I shall not want them to-day."

The old ladies' astonishment and pleasure when Rhoda invited them that afternoon were past telling. They got into the carriage as if in a dream; the splendor of the establishment so overawed them, that it was some time before they could begin to talk even. Rhoda was afraid they would look at the horses and carriage so much that they would miss seeing the places they were bound for; but their excitement at length settled down to a quiet contentment and pride that en-

abled them to look out at the familiar places, and Cousin Drusilla to keep up her plaintive account of old times, which she got very much mixed with new ones however. The Bunkers' house looked decaying and forlorn; but she associated it with the jolly time when she found the red ear, and the young stranger Obadiah Easton snatched the first kiss, and before the evening was over whispered to her that she was the prettiest of the rosy-cheeked crowd. So they drove slowly from place to place until sunset, over the sandy road, and sometimes under odorous pines, but with the breeze and smell of the ocean always round them — and every now and then coming to some point where they could look out on its boundless surface. Rhoda enjoyed it much in their enjoyment. And when at last they stopped at the niece's door, Cousin Drusilla said, "When I go back West, I shall have many good times to tell my children and grandchildren about, but not one will be better or half as good as this. Tell your cousin I am greatly obliged and thankful to her for it, for I've seen the old places I've dreamed of these twenty years, and that I should n't have seen any other way." Aunt Charity also sent her thanks and said, "I don't know what they'd say up at Northfield if they'd seen me riding in such a carriage as this."

CHAPTER XIII.

CLOUDY DAYS.

SAM BOWLER was evidently much gratified that Rhoda had given his Western cousin so much pleasure, and tried to manifest his gratitude by amusing and caring for Jamie even more than before; and many a fine shell and toy-boat were added to his treasures. "Sister," said he one day, "how I wish we could go sailing. He's been washing and painting her all up, and she's a beautiful boat, named the 'Sea Bird.' He wants us to go some pleasant day; I mean to go and ask cousin Esther if we may go."

"I hardly think Cousin Esther will wish us to go, Jamie dear; for she is very much afraid of a boat, she always says; but you may ask."

The little boy and his cousin had a long talk about it. She was becoming very much attached to the affectionate, fearless little fellow, and liked to hear him argue and talk about matters. So, after a long conversation, she promised him if Walter Waring came the next week, and would go with them, Sam might carry them over to

an island much frequented by pleasure sailing parties.

"I am so glad," shouted Jamie. "I know Walter Waring will want to go; all men and boys like to sail."

His confidence in his friend was not misplaced, and he had the pleasure of walking down with him to give Sam notice that, wind and weather permitting, they would like a sail in the "Sea Bird," the next morning.

Sam was waiting, full of consequence and delight, when they reached the wharf; and, after great trimming of the sail, and manœuvrings with the boat, inscrutable to land-lubbers, they were safely stowed in, with shawls and wrappings, and the luncheon baskets packed by thoughtful Mrs. Burns, to be investigated when they reached the island. And now at last, Sam was all right, and his boat was soon gliding along like a duck, obeying every turn of his hand. The day was perfect, with a gentle wind blowing just the right way, and with sky and sea of the clearest blue; so they soon settled themselves to enjoy it to the utmost. Jamie, of course, seated himself as near Sam as he could get, without interfering with the sailing of the boat; and he began a string of questions that reached from the mainland to the island. Rhoda tied her shade hat down over her ears with her veil, and trailing her hand in the water that rippled swiftly by the boat, gave herself up to

delicious revery, while Walter stretched himself lazily on a seat, and read the morning paper. When that was finished, he began to watch Rhoda as she sat dreaming, with her hair tossed and blowing in the breeze. "Rhoda," said he, after a while, "your hair is more like that picture now than it was when I first saw you. I wonder if any other of the old Warrens had that colored hair."

"Red hair, do you mean?" said she, roguishly,

"Well, not exactly red, though it does come somewhere near that color," he answered.

"Yes, some others of them had hair of the same hue. My great-grandfather Joseph, and great-uncle William both had it."

"How do you know?" said he, surprised.

"Why, did I never tell you about that time I went up to the old place at Northfield one fall, ever so long ago?"

"No, you never told me. How happened it?"

"Why, Jotham had to go over there to see old Moses Miller about Thanksgiving poultry; and it was wild grape time, and he had found a very full vine, so he took us children. How well I remember all about that day! We had a delightful time; and went over to the Warren place last. Jamie went out to see them make cider, and Mrs. Miller took me over the house, while she shut the windows, which had been open to drive out the musty smell, she said. When we were in one room up-stairs, she showed me two portraits that

stood on the floor, leaning against the wall, and told me they were the pictures of William and Joseph, and told something about them. You see I remembered it, because old Uncle Zeb had told me the same story that day he died at Stonefield. But the strangest thing about it was, that it seemed to me as though I had seen them before ; and some days after when I looked in the glass in the morning, before I parted my hair (it was short then), I saw my forehead looked like the pictures ; but, of course, I never thought of it again until I came here."

"Did you ever tell Miss Warren about it?"

"No ; I told Mrs. Fields, and she told me what she had heard about my great grandfathers and mothers and uncles and aunts ; but I wish I could hear more."

"They were rather a high-tempered, haughty old set according to all accounts."

"Yes, it seems so, and I am afraid that naturally I am rather like them in mind as well as appearance. I sometimes get to thinking about it and," her voice lowered a little, "I think I can see that, hard as it seemed, it was a very good thing for me to have so much to get along with, and to be so placed as to have to restrain my temper, and give up my will to others, for I know how I should have liked to have my own way, and I used to get so angry ; not that I mean to say that I have no such feelings now, but I really think if I had been

petted and given way to, and brought up as many children are, I should have been worse."

"Well, luckily for us all, you have n't grown up so very bad," said he smiling.

"I am growing young and helpless all the time now; when I think what I was doing a year ago, it does not seem that I am the same girl; but I do like being lazy, I find."

"Sister," called Jamie, "there's the island over there. Sam says it is a mile and a half away yet, but we can see it."

"Mr. Walter," said Sam, "what do you say to my digging a few clams and making a chowder when we get there? I don't think there's any party over there, and we can have it our own way."

"Nothing would suit me better, you know, Sam," said Walter, "for I remember your chowders ever since I was a little boy not much older than Jamie there. But have you the materials to make it?"

"Yes; I never sail without them. You see if I have them with me I can get up a good dinner anywhere along shore."

"Well I am hungry for it now, and Rhoda and I will take hold and help when we get there."

The old man was delighted, as Walter knew he would be, to have his chowder praised, and soon got out a piece of salt pork, some potatoes and onions and an iron kettle, to have ready to take on shore when they arrived; and letting Walter sail

the boat, he began to pare the vegetables, tossing over the parings into the sea ; and by the time the shore was reached, his potatoes and onions were sliced and ready for service.

It was great fun for Jamie to help make fast the boat, and then help unload and carry up to a little grove of trees, the lunch baskets and chowder preparations ; and then, the best of all, to put on his rubber boots and go to help in digging the clams. Sam gave him a spade, showing him where to dig ; for the foolish shellfish instead of keeping hid, would keep throwing up little squirts of water to show their place of habitation. Walter and Rhoda had been picking up driftwood along the shore, and Sam bustled around and soon had a gypsy fire cracking and blazing, and his salt pork fizzing and frying in the bottom of the kettle, while he opened and got out the clams with a speed marvellous to one unused to the operation. Hearing that the chowder would be ready soon, Rhoda unpacked their baskets in a beautiful smooth spot among the trees. She first spread a cloth, and then arranged upon it the cold chicken and sandwiches which thoughtful Mrs. Burns had provided ; she had not forgotten or neglected Jamie's sweet tooth either, and cakes, tarts, and moulds of jelly were added, and when Sam brought his steaming bowls of chowder (for he always carried little bowls to eat it from — nothing else would have been proper for the purpose), they made a famous dinner. The

chowder received all the praise it deserved, which was a great deal, and Sam was proud and satisfied.

Then they roamed over the island and along the beach, Rhoda finding some new and beautiful sea-mosses to press, and Jamie adding another bushel or so of shells and pebbles to his collection. Walter sat and read, and Rhoda accused him of going to sleep; but he was quite uncertain himself as to what he had been doing, which made her accusation seem probable. Time had not begun to hang heavy on their hands, when Sam announced that the tide was right for returning; so, packing up chowder kettle and all, they were soon gliding towards home.

But they did not reach it without more adventure than the beautiful morning seemed to promise. The day would have gone more smoothly than a sea excursion generally does, if there had been no hinderings. After they were out a little way, the wind all died away, and there they lay becalmed; a feeble little breath would come now and then, just enough to fill the sail and cheat them into the belief that they were about to start; but they could see by the shore that they were almost stationary. Then clouds began to pile up in the west, and before long to come hurrying up thicker and faster.

"I should think," said Walter, "if a storm should come up, a wind would rise with it."

"Yes," said Sam; "but the trouble will be, they

both will come together. There's no danger except of a wetting; but I see little cat's-paws on the water. I hope we'll get a start before it comes." Luckily they did; the boat began to move, and before long they were scudding before the wind; but within half a mile of shore, the rain came with a rush. Rhoda and Jamie crept into a little hole called the cabin, and Walter wrapped himself in an old sail and on they drove. The young people could not help a feeling of awe and fear. The thunder roared, and the lightning's zigzag leaps were almost incessant. But Sam was equal to the emergency; he stood with the rudder in one hand, and managing the sail with the other, his gray hair blowing back, and his bright, quick eye watching everywhere; it was nothing fearful to him, but he was anxious to get his load to the shore dry and unhurt. And he succeeded, for the "Sea-Bird" flew gallantly up to the wharf just as the rain began to abate. Patrick was waiting there with umbrellas and waterproofs. "Miss Warren was getting pretty much frightened about you," said he. They hurried up to the house, and found her watching for them.

"Walter, I was getting so frightened," said she. "I do not like the water at all."

"O, there's not much danger in any storm round here, when Sam Bowler sails the craft," replied he; "we've had a very successful day, all but this getting home."

"O, it has been delightful," said Rhoda, "and we are hardly wet at all; this storm makes it the more to be remembered. Anyhow it is a day to be put away among my good times."

"Your red-letter days," said Walter.

"What are they?" asked she.

"O, saints' days are marked with red letters in the calendar; so extra good days are called red-letter days."

7 "Well, this whole summer might be marked with red letters," said Rhoda, as she went away. The summer seemed indeed short when September came, and school was to recommence. Miss Warren concluded to stay at the seaside through the month; but she let Rhoda go into town to attend to her studies. Mrs. Burns would need to be there most of the fortnight, before they all returned, in getting the house in readiness. Jamie would stay, with his beloved goat and Sam Bowler for company; and Rhoda could go out Saturdays. So, on the Monday of the third week in September, Rhoda, Mrs. Burns, and one of the housemaids went into town. The girls were all at school except the beloved Mabel and the unbeloved Fanny. The latter had concluded not to return this winter, and Bessy said that was something to be thankful for, at any rate. In a few days affairs settled into the old routine. Rhoda did not complain of want of occupation now; for with French, drawing, and her music, her hours were

full of business. She was arranging Friday night for her ride to the seashore the next morning, and thinking wistfully of Jamie, from whom she had never before been separated so long, when to her astonishment, who should come rushing into her room but the little fellow himself!

"Why, Jamie, dear, where did you come from?" exclaimed she.

"I came with Burns and Ann," said he. "I've come to stay with you. Cousin Esther's sick."

"Sick! How long has she been sick?"

"I don't know just. Burns will tell." And Jamie, with the happy faculty of children of letting trouble shed off them, went to looking over his treasures in his room.

She found Burns talking with his wife, and asked how long her cousin had been ailing.

"Well, I cannot rightly tell. She has not had much appetite for her food for several days; and yesterday she was taken suddenly with chills, and seemed very poorly. I went for the doctor down there; but I misdoubt his being worth very much; and this morning she seemed in a manner dull, and has not risen from her bed. So I told her I would come up and bring Jamie, and carry back Dr. Fields and my wife; she seemed to like the idea, though she said not much to it."

"I think I had better go," said Rhoda. "I could wait upon her."

"No," said Mrs. Burns, who was hurrying to be

ready for the next train; "you had better stay here, and take charge of Jamie and the house. Ann and Katy will take the best care they can; but they are careless things, and need looking after."

After this followed a long, anxious time. The doctor found Miss Warren in a settled typhoid fever, and expressed great fears of the result; he consulted with the physician that Burns misdoubted, and found him careful and capable. So he went himself every other day; but the disease made steady progress, and Mrs. Warren, who went immediately on hearing of her sickness, became so anxious and worn out, that she came home sick at the end of ten days. Mrs. Burns was getting tired also, and the doctor carried down Mrs. Hawly; for his wife and Miss Mary, now two months old, were both able to be left. Rhoda had mentioned to him several times, that it seemed to her she might do good if there; but he said Miss Esther would not hear of it; so she did not insist. After a run of three weeks, the fever came to a crisis, and the doctor felt that a change for the better had taken place; but coming home from his next visit, he came into the room where Rhoda sat holding the baby, who grew more interesting every day.

"Well," said he, "I don't know what to do about your cousin, Rhoda."

"Why? Is she worse?"

"No; I think she will get well; but such a long, tedious time as it will be! It may be three weeks now before she can raise herself in bed. Mrs. Burns has been very faithful, but she cannot do everything; and Miss Esther is so weak, that she is like a child. She cannot endure Mrs. Hawly; and even if she could, Mrs. Hawly has been sent for, and leaves to-morrow. So I must look up some one to carry down. Mrs. Burns and her husband take care nights; but days there is some person needed careful and still."

"I know of a person," said Rhoda.

"Who?"

"I wish, doctor, you would let me go. You don't any of you know how much I can do, except Mrs. Fields; she knows I used to have some care. Don't speak until I tell you. Cousin Esther has done so much for Jamie and me, and I know she does not feel us any burthen; but she cannot see any comfort in us yet. We are like little guests, that she is very polite to, and trying to make things pleasant for. Well, I want a chance to show her that we may some time be able to be a help to her; and I really think I could be round her in a pleasanter way than a hired nurse."

"I think so too," said Mrs. Fields. "Let us ask Mrs. Warren."

"I do not know what Miss Esther would say to have Rhoda's school interfered with," said the doctor. "Say nothing about it; but let Rhoda go

with you, and tell her she was anxious to come until some one more suitable could be found."

Mrs. Warren, who was better, though still feeble, took Jamie with her, to his satisfaction; for she was one of his most valued friends, and Rhoda went down the next day. She staid downstairs to talk with Mrs. Burns, who looked doubtful when she saw her, having hoped to see a reliable nurse; but Rhoda told her not to be discouraged, for she could do more than they thought. At any rate she was better than nothing, and could stay until some one should be found to take her place. Then she took off her hat and sack, and went very quietly into her cousin's room, where the doctor still sat. Miss Esther did not notice her at first; but when she did, she said, —

"Why, Rhoda, how came you here?"

"I teased the doctor into letting me come," answered she, smiling, and taking her hand softly; her young hand felt so cool and fresh, that it seemed pleasant to the sick lady to feel it.

"Yes," said Dr. Fields; "she has thought she could wait upon you all the time; and when she heard Mrs. Hawly was to leave to-day, nothing would do but she must come; and my wife encouraged her, and I think myself you will find a faithful young nurse, until we have something better to offer."

He then gave Rhoda minute directions about medicines and diet, and went away. It is no use

to follow the dreary routine of a sick room. The result of the experiment we can tell in the doctor's words to Mrs. Warren, about a fortnight after he carried Rhoda to her cousin, when she asked how he found her sister.

"Improving every day. It has been a steady improvement since Rhoda went; she is one of the best-natured nurses I ever saw; she seems to see everything that can be done for the patient's comfort at once; the light in the room is always just right — Miss Esther's eyes shaded, but the room light and pleasant. Mrs. Burns used to come in and whisper; but Rhoda would answer aloud in a low, cheerful voice; she has cheered Miss Esther from the first, which was a very good thing; for she was getting into a fearful state of depression."

"And Esther appreciates what she has done, I hope."

"O, yes; she told me yesterday, that she felt troubled at Rhoda's school being interfered with, but that she could not spare her until she could come home herself. 'For, doctor,' said she, 'you never did such a good thing for me as you did when you brought her down. I begin to feel now that I have some one on whom I can lean, by and by,' and she looks at Rhoda in a very affectionate manner."

"I am very glad. Esther has always stood so alone!" said Mrs. Warren.

It was the last of November before they were

again settled in the city; they had grown tired enough of the ocean. The ceaseless beat of the waves had fretted Miss Esther while she was so weak, and the long evenings that Mrs. Burns and Rhoda spent listening to the howling storms of the autumn were depressing.

"God help the sailors," Mrs. Burns would say, when an unusually fierce blast would make the shutters rattle, as it tried to force its way into the house. "When Burns and I came over, it was in a sailing vessel, and we had two or three storms. In one of them a sailor fell from a mast in the night, and we just heard him give one cry for help as the ship drove on like a mad thing, and that was the last of him."

The beautiful summer sea had become a roaring monster, and it was with solid satisfaction that they all found themselves in the warm, light, secure, city home again. Jamie cared least about it; for he missed his daily frolic with Walter Waring, who, in his estimation, was the greatest man and most worthy of imitation of all the people he knew. The glories of Jotham paled before this new star. Rhoda was particularly happy; for she felt she stood on a different footing now. As she had said, she was a guest. Now she was more a beloved daughter of the house — one to be petted or found fault with, as the case might be, but assured of her place and usefulness. She concluded not to enter school again until after the Christmas holidays;

and she began to make preparations for gifts differently from the preceding Christmas. Her cousin gave her two new fifty-dollar bills, telling her it was for her to buy gifts for her friends. She could hardly believe her eyes. It seemed a sum of such magnitude for that purpose, she could hardly sleep nights for planning. She made list after list of what she intended doing, and then tore them up; but after great consultation with Bessy Kent, she had everything ready when the day came round. Mary Warren Fields had a magnificent pap spoon, while her mother had a fine colored photograph of Rhoda and Jamie; breakfast-shawls knit very privately of beautiful wools, were for Cousin Esther and her sister; Jamie was to rejoice in a beautiful sled; the cap for Mrs. Burns was a model of beauty, while Burns could never complain of cold head or hands if he wore the seal-skin cap and gloves she had bought him; Bessy Kent's room was to be graced by a darling little writing-table; and all the servants were remembered; and after all, she had twenty-five dollars left. There was a purpose she would like to give it for; but she did not wish to do it without consulting Cousin Esther, and she hesitated about mentioning it to her. But a few days before Christmas, she ventured.

"Cousin Esther, I have bought presents for all of my friends, and I have twenty-five dollars left; may I spend it in cakes, fruits, and candies, and

send them to Stonefield poor-farm? I suppose there are little children there, just as there used to be, and it would make them so glad ! ”

“ Certainly, my dear, and I am glad you thought of it ; and I will add some cloth for clothing, and some books.”

So it was done, and Rhoda had the satisfaction of seeing Burns nail up a large box, and direct it to Mr. Harmon, for the children of the poor-farm, from Rhoda and James Thornton. And with chimes, and sweet memories, and pleasant anticipations, old Christmas came again. Rhoda had been so busy with her presents to others, that she had no time to speculate much as to what her own gifts would be ; but Jamie insisted upon hanging his stocking down in the sitting-room, as there was no chimney in his room, and he chose to believe in the fiction of Santa Claus, although Aunt Debby had not encouraged any such myth. Rhoda and Burns, with Cousin Esther watching, had pleasure in packing the stocking over night. The sled was placed on the floor underneath, and large articles packed on that. Rhoda was astonished at his gifts ; for all the little circle of friends and servants had remembered him. Books, mechanical toys, whips, balls, and a drum were among the number ; but there was nothing from Cousin Esther, Rhoda remembered after she had gone to bed. When the chimes woke her in the morning, she found Jamie dressing, to visit his

stocking. So, wishing to see his pleasure, she dressed also, and they went down together. Burns and his wife were there, and all three enjoyed his raptures, as he danced and shouted, while Rhoda tried to restrain his noise, for fear of disturbing his cousin. After he had shaken the last crumb from his stocking, Mrs. Burns spoke.

"Well, Miss Rhoda, don't you expect anything? You never seem to think of yourself."

"O, yes; I shall have something by and by," said Rhoda.

"Why don't you look round?"

"Sure enough," said she, seeing Cousin Esther's work-table covered with a cloth. When it was taken off, what beautiful things appeared! Dr. Fields had heard from his wife of the first book she found Rhoda reading, and had given a fine illustrated copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*; there was an inlaid writing-desk from his wife, a set of ermine furs from Mrs. Warren, while a pretty embroidered handkerchief showed Bessy's skill and remembrance; and trifles from Burns and his wife and the servants filled vacant spaces. Both the children sat down to admire and talk until breakfast, when Cousin Esther came down to join in the admiration.

"But," said Jamie, suddenly, "you haven't given me anything, Cousin Esther."

"Have n't I?" said she. "Why, how forgetful I must be! and I hardly think I have given any-

thing to Rhoda either. It's queer I should forget Christmas when I was remembered by such a lovely breakfast shawl."

"Will the stores all be shut up to-day?" said he, ruefully. Like other rich people, the more he had the more he wanted.

"I am afraid so," said she.

"You might get us something for New Year's," said he, brightening up.

And the subject dropped; but Rhoda noticed that Burns looked at Miss Esther with wise drollery. Just after breakfast, the bell rang.

"A man wants to see you, Master Jamie," announced Burns.

Jamie looked rather surprised, but walked to the door. A man stood on the sidewalk beside a tiny Shetland pony, with a fine saddle and bridle.

"I was told," said the man, "to bring this pony to Master James Thornton. Are you he?"

Jamie's shout brought all to the door. "O, Cousin Esther, Cousin Esther, this is your present to me." And he just hid his face in Rhoda's dress for a minute, for fear he should cry.

"Get your cap and coat, and go round to the stable with the man," said Burns, "and he'll tell you about the pony."

As Rhoda stood watching them go away, a carriage drove up; she turned, and there stood the most beautiful horse and pony carriage, that

must have come from fairy land. It was her turn now.

"Why, Cousin Esther, is that mine? I cannot believe it."

"You may, my dear; for it certainly is yours. I suppose you cannot use it much this winter; but it will be ready for spring."

Mrs. Warren and Walter, Dr., Mrs., and baby Fields dined here again this Christmas, and Rhoda trimmed her great aunt's lovely picture with long trails of ground pine, that the milkman brought.

"I think, Cousin Esther," said she, "I ought to love this picture, if it does look like me. Only think; I must give up calling myself a little girl soon. Before another Christmas comes, I shall have passed my sixteenth birthday."

CHAPTER XIV.

"GOOD-BY, RHODA."

YES; Rhoda was

"Standing, with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

So it is time we come to our last chapter, though we have followed the little maiden until we rather dislike to leave her. We should like to see her a fair, young woman, and trace Jamie through college and on to manhood; but all we can do is to show a few more pictures of Rhoda's last year as a little girl.

Mrs. Dyer's school went on as usual through the remainder of the school year, and she went with it, driving a little on pleasant days under Patrick's skilful instruction. "Fay," as she named her pony, proved to be all promised by its former owner—gentle and easy-mouthed, unscared by cars, bands, and other unusual sights or sounds, but still fleet and spirited. Little rough "Brownie," Jamie's Shetland, was more freakish; but his little master showed a natural aptitude for his manage-



"I WAS TOLD TO BRING THIS PONY TO MASTER JAMES
THORNTON." Page 254.

ment, and could ride whether he ran or walked, and was monkeyish in sticking to his back in spite of shying and kicking; besides, he was so small, that a fall from him was no such great matter; and Patrick decided that his antics were not viciousness, but arose from playfulness, and that Jamie was the best little rider to be found outside a circus. So the little boy enjoyed his Christmas gift to his heart's content. When warm spring days came, Fay was out almost every day. Sometimes Bessy Kent enjoyed the drive, at others Mrs. Fields and baby, and even Cousin Esther ventured now and then, to Rhoda's great delight, as it gave her an opportunity to display her driving. A question of great importance with Miss Warren this spring was, where to spend the summer. She had staid so late at the seaside the preceding fall, that she disliked the idea of going again this summer, and Dr. Fields also thought that hill air might be of more benefit to her, as she had scarcely yet recovered her strength. Many consultations were held. All thought of the old place at Northfield, standing, as it did, on a breezy hill up in the hill country; but none liked to suggest it, as she did not. But when, in the latter part of March, a letter came from Jotham, announcing that Martha had a little son, named "Daniel Easton Harris," and wishing that she and Jamie might visit them during the summer, Miss Esther spoke:—

"What do you think, Rhoda, of our all going to Northfield for the summer?"

"O, if you only would, Cousin Esther, it would be the most delightful place to Jamie and me that could be found. We should be within riding distance of Southfield, and I should like so much to go round to the old places!"

"I have been thinking of it all along. It has ~~not~~ been a pleasant place to me for many years; but I feel that some of the unpleasantness will be done away with now. It seemed sad to me to think, when there, of the family, once large and flourishing, narrowed down to my brother and myself, and no one to come after us. I used to think of the days coming when it would be sold. Now, Jamie, if he lives, will have it, and he ought to be learning to love it. I have thought sometimes of having Warren his last instead of his middle name; but I feel that maybe the family will flourish better under a new name. I feel, at any rate, that you young folks may fill the old house with life and spirit again, and I have determined to send Burns next week to see what must be done to make it ready for us."

All her friends approved her decision, and Burns soon had workmen inside and outside of the house. The shrubbery was trimmed, trees and branches that interfered with the view or darkened the rooms cut down or lopped off, and outbuildings, that had grown rather slovenly under old

Moses' sway, were patched up and painted into respectability. Moses and Sally, with their son's family, moved into the farmhouse, and a thorough clearing out began. The old breakfast-room, shut up for years, smiled when the morning sun peeped in on the new paper and furniture, and the old, musty, close smell of the house went hurrying out of doors and windows once more thrown wide open. Great interest was felt among the people round; for it looked pleasant to see signs of occupation and life about the long-closed front of the house.

"What do you think, Martha?" said Jotham, bringing in the note Rhoda had written, telling of their plans, and thanking them for letting her know of baby's arrival; "they are all coming to the old place in Northfield for the summer. I came by there after I got this letter at the office; for I was so pleased, that I did n't begrudge a mile out of the way to see if they had begun; and I declare, you'd hardly know the place, so quick. They've cut down, and trimmed up, and fixed the fences, and are painting house and everything a kind of stone drab. It looks first rate now. So I thought I'd just go a minute inside. There was a stiff kind of a man, all dressed up, superintending round. He looked at me kind of cool, but I guessed he was Burns, Rhoda writes about; so I said I supposed he was Mr. Burns, and that I was Jotham Harris. I'd had a note from Rhoda, telling they

were coming, and I was so pleased, I had to come round and see if they'd begun. He mellowed right down and shook hands, and said he was glad I'd come, and he'd like to ask me some things about the barn and about getting a first-rate cow. So, after we'd looked over the house, we went out, and he showed me round; and you ought to have heard him talk about the children. He thinks a power about them; telling about Master Jamie, as he calls him, having the place, and Miss Esther wanting to keep it in order for him. I tell you, it's done me as much good as a fifty-dollar bill would."

"Well, I am glad. Now we can see them often through the summer," said Martha, while Susy Blake, who was with them as head-nurse, — a situation she seemed really to have a faculty for, — stood with mouth stretched in a wide smile, while she dandled Danny up and down to his satisfaction. The news made a little fluttering over at Northfield Centre; the old folks remembered when the occupation of the house foretold visiting, driving, and pleasure. Fanny Folger heard it without much gratification.

"It seems my luck," she said to her mother, "to have that disagreeable Rhoda Thornton follow me round."

"I am sorry you will not try to be intimate with her," said her mother, peevishly; "for it would give you such an entrance among the first people."

"Well, I shan't; for I can't bear her," was Fanny's dutiful answer.

By the first of June the whole place bloomed like the cinnamon roses in the old flower-garden, and all the family came the next week, except Rhoda, who staid a week longer in the city to finish school. It was late on a lovely June afternoon when she stepped from the cars at the nearest station to Northfield. Patrick and Jamie were waiting for her, and she was soon driving over the familiar road. She knew every turn; that way led to Aunt Debby's; this way would go by Mr. Easton's; before, the hills rose, and Northfield Centre would soon come in view; behind, down among the valleys, lay Stonefield. She could not say much to Jamie, who talked, as usual, all the time. Tears were very near her eyes, though she was far from sorrowful; but how long the six years since Uncle Zeb's death! Now Northfield church spire is in sight, and she hears Jamie telling of his riding to see Arthur Winters, and then they pass the doctor's; but it is supper hour in the country, and they see no one; but a little farther on they overtake a gentleman walking fast. Can it be? — yes; it is Mr. Greene.

"O, stop, Patrick, a moment. I must speak to him."

So the carriage stops, and Mr. Greene looks up surprised.

"Why, is it possible that this is you, Rhoda?"

He is so pleased, that he forgets to talk in his schoolmaster style "Well, I am very glad to see you."

"I am to see you, Mr. Greene. Do you know we are going to be here all summer?"

"So I have heard, and it gave me great satisfaction; for you were a pupil whom I remember with great pride and affection." He had recovered himself again.

"I hope you will come to my cousin's and see me while I am here."

"I certainly shall with great pleasure."

And the carriage drove on again, the hills still rising, and before long they turned into the avenue, only twice before visited by her; but the house looks very different from the way it looked on that funeral occasion. The long parlor windows are open, and Cousin Esther is watching for them there; Mrs. Burns can be seen superintending the finishing touches to the tea-table in the breakfast room through the bay window; the broad hall ran through the house, and the doors were open at both ends, so a pretty picture, golden with the setting sunlight, can be seen through the farther one.

"Why, Cousin Esther, what a beautiful place this is?" exclaims she.

"I am glad you think so, my dear. Indeed, it looks pleasant to me this summer, the first time for years."

After tea she and Jamie started on a tour round the place. They visited Fay and Brownie, and the new Alderney Jotham had found for them. As the dew began to fall, they went in ; but Rhoda stopped a moment at the door, to look at the moon rising over the eastern hills. Down at the foot of the avenue a whippoorwill was making its monotonous complaint ; the katydids in the elms close by persisted in accusing poor Katy ; and all the summer noises of shrill toads and peeping frogs sounded in her ears. A deep, thankful, prayerful peace fell upon her ; she could only express it by going softly in, and opening the piano ; she presently began to play a sweet, old psalm tune that her mother used to sing, while the words of Montgomery's beautiful hymn fell softly on her Cousin Esther's ear : —

"One prayer I have, all prayers in one,
When I am wholly Thine :
Thy will, my God, Thy will be done,
And let that will be mine.

"Is life with many comforts crowned,
Upheld in peace and health,
With dear affections twined around,
Lord, in my time of wealth, —

"May I remember that to Thee
Whate'er I have I owe,
And back in gratitude from me
May all Thy bounties flow."

The next day was Saturday, and showery ; so

she concluded to defer her visit to Southfield until the next week. But Sunday morning was bright, and they went to meeting in the old church at Northfield, where the same good, old, gray-haired minister still preached, and one of Rhoda's little coincidences happened. She and Fanny Folger went up the steps together as they did on her first appearance there. Fanny had no need of drawing her dress from Rhoda's contaminating touch; but there was a marked difference in the two girls' dress even now. Rhoda was taller and larger than Fanny; but she dressed in a plain, unassuming, young girl's attire, every article of fine material, but carefully made to avoid the appearance of being grown up, while Miss Fanny, who was, to be sure, a few months older, having just passed sixteen, bloomed out in the latest style for young ladies; she was even engrossing the attention of a dapper, little, boyish young man, with the tiniest mustache and a cane, but who made up for many deficiencies by a very tall hat. She was so interested, that she quite overlooked Rhoda until her mother recalled her to herself, when she bowed and smiled charmingly, and offered her dainty, lavender-gloved hand to her. Rhoda recognized the little gallant as one of Dr. Walker's boys, who had been so attractive the year before; and she hurried into church when she heard him whisper, and request to be introduced to Miss Thornton. Much more pleased was she to

meet her old friends Nancy and Phebe Brown, pretty, rosy-cheeked, and smiling. She found time to insist upon their coming to see her the next afternoon, for Miss Esther knew of the family, and had told Rhoda to invite them. But the next day what was Rhoda's disgust when Fanny made her appearance to call, with the same little specimens, whom she called Mr. Davis ! But they made but a short tarry, meeting Nancy and Phebe, jogging up the avenue in their father's chaise, as they drove away. Mr. Davis might have been heard remarking that it was a pity such a fine looking, young lady should be so childish, and unused to the ways of society ; but could he have heard Rhoda's account of the visit to her cousin, I fear he would not have thought her so unsophisticated. Cousin Esther was driving at the time of the call.

"I've had a queer time, Cousin Esther, since you went out. Fanny Folger and that Davis boy have been here. I saw them coming, and ran to your room to try and get you to go down. I thought maybe you could make some excuse for me, but I found you gone ; so I went down, determined to stop their coming again very soon. So when Fanny flourished, and introduced Mr. Davis, I said, 'How do you do?' and that I had seen him going to Dr. Walker's school. He said, 'O, yes, he used to go there.' I said, 'Do you not go there now? Whose school do you attend?' I

wish you could have seen his face. I kept sober and innocent-looking. He said he was in college; I said, 'Indeed, he must be young for that,' and asked when he entered; and the truth of the matter is, he has just entered; don't begin until September. Then I talked school to Fanny, and asked about her French and music, as though there were nothing else I could think of."

"I hope you were not rude," said her cousin, laughing.

"O, no; I only made myself very young and green."

But now came the visit to Jotham and Martha. She took Fay, and Jamie rode Brownie, and they started directly after breakfast; for they intended making a long day. Rhoda had a liberal allowance of her own now, to spend as she pleased, and from it she had bought a silver cup and spoon, marked for the baby, and a gorgeous pink cambric and green shawl for Susy, who had an eye for bright colors. About nine o'clock they drove into the yard. How natural everything looked! Aunt Debby would have been pleased could she have known how unchanged the place was to stand; but they had not much time for observation, for before they stopped, Jotham came shouting from the barn. John Speers was seen hurrying from the field where he was hoeing, while Martha and baby rushed from the front door, as Susy, flourishing a dishcloth, came from the kitchen. John

Speers almost took Jamie up, horse and all, and it was Babel for a few seconds ; but the women folks soon worked themselves into the sitting-room, while Jamie and the ponies and carriages were taken in charge by Jotham and John Speers. First, of course, the baby must be admired, and Rhoda could do so in truth. He was a great, fat, good-natured fellow, almost as large at three months as little, sweet Nancy Fields at ten months old. He really seemed to notice his bright cup and spoon, and frowned, gasped, and fumbled after it in regular baby style. But Susy was speechless at sight of her dress and shawl for some time, but finally came from the kitchen to say, —

"I say, Rhoda, them's the prettiest things ever I see. There ain't such a dress and shawl comes into the meeting-house." And tossing her head in anticipation of the effect of her new clothes, she marched out again.

Then Rhoda started to go over the house. She went first to her old room ; it looked much smaller and poorer than it used, but she looked from the window on the familiar scenes. Down in the poultry yard she saw Jamie. He looked up at her sorrowfully.

"O, Rhoda, the old peacock is dead ! Is n't that too bad ? Jotham says he is going to get another ; but it won't be that one."

No, little Jamie ; you will find your losses can

never be replaced in this world. They may seem to be ; the new friend may be equally dear, but he never takes the place of the lost one ; the new peacock may spread a more gorgeous tail than the old one, but the old one filled one place, the new one another. Then she went from room to room, all unchanged, except the best front chamber, which was now carpeted with an English carpet. Aunt Debby's family portraits were scattered round among the upper rooms.

"They looked so kind of wild and scary all together," said Martha, "that I thought I would kind of spread them round."

"Yes," said Rhoda, "I am glad you did ; for I used to be almost afraid to go into the parlor alone, when it was half dark, they stared so."

The parlor was more changed than any other place ; for Martha had refurnished it in quite a modern style. After the house had been visited, Martha went into the kitchen to see about dinner, while Susy took Danny for his nap, and a most vigorous rocking and lullabying began ; and Rhoda started for the barn and outdoor places of interest. The currant and gooseberry bushes must be visited, and Jotham must show her every new pig and calf on the place, and tell where he had changed crops in the fields, so that before she seemed to be there an hour, the call to dinner came. After the boiled chickens and accompaniments had been attended to, they walked down to see Mrs. Speers.

Jamie would have been there before but that he had a present for her, and he was bashful of presenting it alone. His Cousin Esther, hearing how fond she had been of the little boy, had given him a bundle for her, containing a nice black silk dress pattern. She cried over and hugged her pet, and rejoiced in seeing Rhoda. As for the dress, no words could express her delight; she said it was what "she'd always hankered after, but never expected to get." Cousin Esther had desired they would start for home in season to arrive before sunset; so they went back to the house, for Rhoda had a little matter of business to talk over with Jotham.

"You remember, Jotham," said she, "the money Mr. Burdick brought Jamie and me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have it, now. Of course Cousin Esther gives us so much that we have never needed to touch it, and I asked her yesterday, whether I could not do something with it for Stonefield poor-farm. She thought it would be a good plan, and told me to ask you who the overseer of the poor in that town was, and let you hand it to him. I thought if he was willing, it might be used in finishing up the garret rooms, where the children sleep, and putting in some drawers and glasses."

"I'll see that it is done. I think I know who is overseer. At any rate I can find out to-morrow, and it shall be done right off."

After an hour more spent by Jotham in listening to Rhoda's account of her life in the city, Fay was harnessed and Brownie saddled, and they rode off, promising to spend a day every week or fortnight through the summer, if Martha would only take her baby and visit them soon.

"Well," said Jotham, "it don't seem much as though they could be the same little children I brought over here six years ago."

"I don't know," said Martha. "I see the same little girl in her that came to our house the night they were lost; she looked different from the others then. There always was the making of a lady in her, and wherever she had been put, it would have come out."

"Well, I guess it was so," said he. Like a wise man, he agreed with his wife.

Rhoda had been hoping for a visit from Bessy Kent during the summer; but she wrote that her mother was not well, and the doctors had advised them to try salt air for her, and she must be with her. So she gave up having her company in a visit she had on her mind to make.

"Cousin Esther," said Rhoda one evening in the latter part of July, "I should like very much to go over to the poor-farm to-morrow afternoon, if you are willing. It will be just six years since Jotham took us away, and I have never even passed it since. Aunt Debby never had business to take her that way."

"I remember the day well. It is six years since my brother's funeral," said Miss Warren. "Well," said she, after a pause, "I do not know as I have any objection. I suppose Jamie will not care to go."

"No," said Rhoda; "he cannot remember much about it."

"You had better let Patrick take you in the carriage, — for it is rather a lonely road for you to drive alone, — part of the way, at least."

The next day Mrs. Burns packed a basket full of good things for Rhoda to carry to the children; and she looked among her stores for some remembrances to carry Janey and Viney Hunt. She took a stereoscope, with fine painted pictures, for Viney's hoard of treasures, and a great bundle of bright German wools, with crochet and knitting needles for Janey, and cousin Esther added cloth for dresses for all the children there; so she and Patrick started with quite a load. She was glad she was alone in the carriage, as she rode down the hills, ever down towards Stonefield. She almost felt as though she was picking up the lonely, desolate feelings she left along that road six years before, and seeming to feel her coarse, heavy, new shoes on her feet, and expecting to see three-year old Jimmy beside her under his mushroom hat. She rode along in a state of mind in which past and present were strangely jumbled together. But there, at length, was the house. That brought her to herself, and they soon stopped before the

door. A successor of Susy Blake, slipshod and dilapidated, opened the door, and managed to make Rhoda understand that she was to step into the parlor. She sat down on the black, shiny sofa, where Aunt Debby sat when she pleaded for Jamie's company that day. Soon Mrs. Harmon came in. Evidently she had seen the carriage with Caliph and Sultan, and supposing some great person had arrived, had stopped to change her cap and apron. Rhoda went towards her without speaking, but holding out her hand. Mrs. Harmon was short and fat, and had to look up to her visitor. There was no gleam of recognition in her eyes; but when Rhoda smiled and said, "Don't you know me, Mrs. Harmon?" she exclaimed, "Why, bless my stars, if it is n't little Rhoda Thornton!" She was really glad to see her, and called in Mr. Harmon.

"Well, well," said he, "I never should have knowed ye in the world. Why didn't Jimmy come?"

"Cousin Esther thought he better not to-day."

"You must come up-stairs and see how nice the money you sent fixed up the garret; and the Christmas things gave the children a great treat."

"I am glad," said Rhoda; "but I want to see Janey and Viney Hunt."

"Ah, didn't you know? Janey is dead; she died last January; she'd been failing for a year, but she was quite smart Christmas, and took lots

of comfort in the things in the box ; but she run down fast after New Year's."

Rhoda's eyes filled with tears ; she had hoped to see the poor lame girl again.

"She was growing very crippled. It was a mercy she was taken. She was very pleasant and quiet to the last ; then she was kind of out of her head, and talked of seeing bright-looking folks round her, and said she should n't want her crutch, and kept smiling till she died."

"I am glad for her," said Rhoda.

They went to see Viney, who looked just as she used to. She had grown but little ; but Mrs. Harmon thought she enjoyed rather better health. She was very glad to see Rhoda, and received her stereoscope and wools with delight ; she had added Janey's little crutch to her treasures. Rhoda went and stood under the elm-tree where Uncle Zeb died, and where she first heard of "Warrens over in Northfield." When she saw the children all together, and distributed Mrs. Burns's basket-load among them, and gave Mrs. Harmon the handsome shawl she brought her, and Cousin Esther's bundle for the benefit of the house, then she said good-by, and got into the carriage ; and here, where we first saw her, we will say, with Viney Hunt, who, having followed her like her shadow round the house, now stands with her arms full of her treasures, and as the bright, sweet face leans from the carriage for a last word, calls out, —

"Good-by, Rhoda."

